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Adventure

GOLD AT SEA—*by* NORMAN SPRINGER

THE SNOW BURNER PAYS—*by* HENRY COYEN

and OTHERS

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4

Big Novelettes

are included in the October ADVENTURE, making it one of the strongest issues of the year.

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In addition to these 4 novelettes there are many cracking good short stories in this issue. You'll find it rather more than a big 15 cents' worth.

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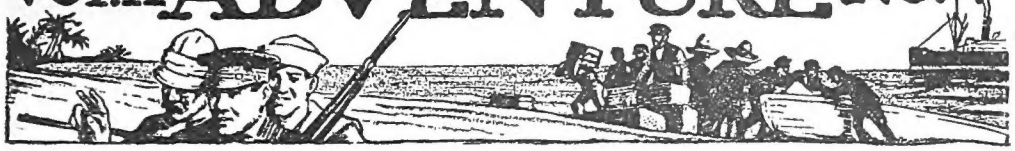

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LOOK AHEAD!

Take a look ahead at what's coming in the October ADVENTURE, on the stands September 3d. It's worth looking at.

4 Complete Novelettes

All in this one issue, and all "good stuff." These alone make this one number of ADVENTURE better reading—and more of it—than an ordinary $1.50 book. They deal with the European War, the West, the sea, and the Mexican border.

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W. Townend wrote it. He always writes well, but he has outdone himself in this. It is—this is said advisedly—one of the strongest stories of the year. You will agree to this when you've read it.

"The Salters"

An adventurous, humorous novelette, laid near the Mexican border. Captain George B. Rodney knows the Army and the West, and knows how to write a good story.

"The Whaler"

Frederick William Wallace has from his childhood up spent much of his life at sea. He needs no recommendation to our readers.

"Beyond the Law"

The fourth novelette for October is by Jackson Gregory and sets forth happenings in a Western mountain valley.

"Hard Rock"

First, last and always this is a story for strong men. By Julius G. Furthmann.

"An Occasional Hero"

Like "Hard Rock" this introduces a writer new to ADVENTURE readers—M. S. Wightman. And you'll be glad to meet both men.

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September 1915
VOL. X
NO. 5

The Snow Burner Pays

A Complete Novel

by Henry Oyen

Author of "The Snow Burner," "The Man-Trail," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE CHEATING OF THE RIVER

"IT'S GOT him! The river's got him. He's drowned! 'Hell-Camp' Reivers—he's gone. He's done for. The 'Snow Burner' is dead, dead, dead!"

Like wolves revolting, the men of Cameron-Dam Camp—the famous "Hell Camp" of the north woods—lined the bank of the rushing, ice-choked river and cursed and roared into the blackness of the night. Behind them the buildings of the camp, scene of the Snow Burner's inhuman brutality and dominance over the lives of men, were going up in seas of flame which the men had started.

Before them the tumultuous river, the waters battling the ice which strove to cover it, tossed black and white under the red glow of tumbling fire. And somewhere out in the murderous current, whirled and sucked down by the rushing water, buffeted and crushed by the grinding ice, a bullet-hole through his shoulder, was all that was left of the man whose life they had cried for.

The river had cheated them. Like panting wolves, their hands outstretched claw-like to clutch and kill, they had pursued him closely to the river's edge. A cry of rage, short, sharp, unreasoning, had leaped from their throats as Reivers, staggering from his wound, had leaped unhesitatingly out on to the heaving cakes of ice.

Spellbound, open-mouthed and silent, they had stood and watched as their erstwhile oppressor ran zigzagging, leaping from cake to cake, out toward the black slip of open water which ran silently, swiftly in the river's middle. And then they had cried out again.

For the open water had caught him. Straight into it, without pausing or swerving, Reivers had run on. And the black water had taken him home. Like a stone dropped into its midst, it had taken him

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plump—a flirt of spray, a gurgle. Then the waters rushed on as before, silent, deadly, unconcerned.

And so the men of Hell Camp, drunk with the spirit and success of their revolt, cried out in triumph. Their cry rose over the roar of flame. It rang above the rumble of crunching ice. It reached, pæan-like, up through the star-filled northern night—a cry of victory, of gratification, the old, terrible cry of the kill.

For the Snow Burner was gone. Wolf-like he had harried them and wolf-like he had died. No man, not even Hell-Camp Reivers, they knew, could live a minute in that black water. They had seen the waters close above him; a floe of ice swept serenely over the spot where he had gone down. He was gone. The world was rid of him.

And so the men of Cameron-Dam Camp, while their cry still echoed in the timber, turned to carry the news of the Snow Burner's end back to the men who were milling about the burning camp. The Snow Burner was dead!

OUT in the deadly river, Hell-Camp Reivers stayed under water until he knew that the men on the bank counted him drowned. He had sought the open water deliberately, his giant lungs filling themselves with air as he plunged down to the superhuman test which was to spell life or death for him.

He realized that if he were to live he must appear to perish in the river, before the eyes of the men who pursued him. To have won through the open water, and over the ice beyond, and in their sight have reached the farther shore would have sealed his doom as surely as to have returned to the bank where stood the men.

The camp had revolted. Two hundred men had said that he must die; and had he been seen to cross the river and enter the timber beyond, half of the two hundred, properly armed, would have crossed the stringers of the dam, not to pause or rest until they had hunted him down. He was without weapons of any kind save his bare fists. He was bleeding heavily from the bullet-hole in his right shoulder. He would have died like a wounded wolf run to earth had he been seen to cross the river safely. His only chance for life was to appear to die in the river.

He made no fight as he went down. The swift waters sucked him under like a straw. They rolled him over the rocky bottom, whirled him around and around sunken piles of ice. Into the sluice-like current of the stream's middle they spewed him, and the current caught him and shot him into the darkness below the glare of the burning camp.

He lay inert in the waters' grasp, recking not how the sharp ice gashed and tore face and hands, how the rocks crushed and bruised his body. A sweeping ice-floe caught him and held him down. Like some great river-beast he lay supine beneath it, conserving every atom of his giant's strength for the test that was to win him life.

Then, with the blood roaring in his temples, and his bursting lungs warning him that the next second must yield him air or death, he threw his body upward against the ice, felt it slip to one side, thrust his upturned face out of the water, caught a finger-hold on another floe that strove to thrust him down, gasped, clawed and—laughed.

He was a dead man, and he lived. Men had driven him into the jaws of death, and death had engulfed and apparently swallowed him. Men counted him now as one who had gone hence. Far and wide the word would be flung in a hurry: the Snow Burner was no more; Hell-Camp Reivers had passed away.

The face of the Snow Burner as it rode barely above the icy, lapping waters, bore but one single expression, a sardonic appreciation of the joke he had played upon men and Death. The loss of Cameron Camp, of his position, of all that he called his own did not trouble him.

As the current swept him down there, he was a beaten man, stripped of all the things that men struggle for to have and to hold, and with but a slippery finger-hold on life itself. Yet he was victorious, triumphant.

He had placed himself within the clammy fingers of the River Death. The fingers had closed upon him, and he had torn them apart, had thrust death away, had clutched life as it fleeted from him and had drawn it back to hold for the time being. And Reivers laughed contemptuously, tauntingly, at the sucking waters cheated of their prey.

"Not yet, Nick, old boy," he muttered. "It doesn't please me to boss your stokers just yet."

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The current tore the ice from his precarious grip and he was forced to swim for it. In the darkness he struck the grinding ice-field on the far side of the open water, and like the claws of a bear his stiffening fingers sought for and found a crevice to afford a secure hold.

A pull, a heave and a wriggle, and he lay face-down on the jagged ice—heart, lungs and brain crying for the cold air which he sucked in avidly. The ice-cakes parted beneath his weight. Once more he fought through the water to a resting place on the ice; once more the treacherous ice parted and dropped him into the water.

Swimming, crawling, wriggling his way, he fought on. At last an outstretched hand groped to a hold on a snow-covered root on the far bank of the river.

"About time," he said and, slowly drawing himself up onto the bank, he rolled over in the snow and lay with his face turned back toward Cameron Camp.

The fire which the men had started in the long bunk-house when they had revolted against the inhumanity of Reivers now had gained full headway. In pitchy, red billows of flame the dried log walls were roaring upward into the night. Like the yipping of maddened demons, the bellowing shouts of the men came back to him as they danced and leaped around the fire in celebration of the passing of Reivers and of the camp for which his treatment of men had justly earned the title of Hell Camp.

But louder and more poignant even than the roar of flame and the shouts of jubilant men, there came to Reivers' ears a sound which prompted him to drag himself to an elbow to listen. Somewhere out in the timber near the camp a man was crying for mercy. A rifle cracked; the pleading stopped. Reivers smiled contemptuously.

"One of the guards; they got him," he mused. "The fool! That's what he gets for being silly enough to be faithful to me."

But the fate of the guard, one of the "shot-gun artists" who had served him faithfully and brutally in the task of keeping the men of the camp helpless under his heel, roused Reivers to the need of quick action. If the guards had escaped into the woods and were being hunted down by the maddened crew, the hunt might easily lead across the dam and up the bank to where he lay. Once let it be known that he had not perished in the river, and the whole camp would come swarming across the dam, each man's hand against him, resolved to take his trail and hunt him down, no matter where the trail might lead or how long the hunt might take.

The fight through the river ice was but the preliminary to his flight for safety. Many miles of cold trail between him and the burning camp were his most urgent present needs, and with a curse he staggered to his feet and stood for a moment lowering back across the water to the scene of his overthrow.

To a lesser man—or a better man—there would have been deep humiliation in the situation. Reivers's mind flashed back over the incidents of the last few hours. Over there, across the river, he had been beaten for the first time in his life in a fair, stand-up fist fight. He had underestimated young Treplin, and Treplin had beaten him.

Following his defeat had come the revolt of the men. Following that had come flight. The power and leadership of the camp had been wrested from his hands by a better man; he himself had been driven out, helpless, beaten, yet Reivers only laughed as he stood now and looked back across the river. For in the river the Snow Burner had died.

The past was dead. A new life was beginning for him. It had to be so, for if word went back that the Snow Burner was still alive the men of Cameron-Dam Camp would come clamoring to the hunt. To die, and yet to live; to slough one life, as an old coat, and to take up another, not having the slightest notion of what it might hold—that was the great adventure, that was something so interesting that the humiliation of defeat never so much as reached beneath Reivers' skin.

He stood for a moment, looking back at the camp, and he smiled. He waved his left hand in a polished gesture of contemptuous farewell.

"Good-by, Mr. Hell-Camp Reivers," he growled. "Hello, Mr. New Man, whoever you are. Let's go and lay up till the puncture in your hide heals. Then we'll go out and see what you can do to this silly old world."

With his fingers clutching the hole in his shoulder, he turned and lurched drunkenly away into the blackness of the thick timber.

The icy waters of the river had been kind

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to him in more ways than one. They had congealed the warm blood-spurts from his wound into a solid red clot, and his thick woolen shirt and mackinaw were frozen stiff and tight against the clot.

He held to his staggering run for an hour, seeking bare spots in the timber, traveling on top of windfalls when he found them, hiding his trail in uncanny fashion, before his body grew warm enough to thaw the icy bandages. Then he halted and, by the light of the cold moon, bared his shoulder and took stock. It was a bad, ragged wound. He moved the shoulder and smiled sardonically as he noted that no bone was touched.

From the butt of a shattered windfall he tore a flat sliver of clean pine. With his teeth he worried it down to a proper size, and with handkerchief and belt he bound it over the wound so tightly that it sunk deep into the muscles of the shoulder. It chafed and cut the skin and started the blood in half a dozen places, but he pulled the belt up another hole despite the inclination to grimace from pain.

"Suffer, Body," he muttered, "suffer all you please. You've nothing to say about this. Your job for the present is merely to serve life by keeping it going. Later on you may grow whole again. I shall need you."

He buttoned his mackinaw with difficulty and, finding an open space, turned and took his bearings. Far behind him a dull red glow on the sky marked the location of Cameron-Dam Camp. From this he turned, carefully scanning the heavens, until above the top of the timber he caught the weird glint of the northern lights. That way lay his course.

The white man's country stopped with the timber in which he stood. Beyond was Indian country, the bleak, barren Dead Lands, a wilderness too bare of timber to tempt the logger, a land of ridge upon ridge of ragged rock, unexplored by white man, save for a rare mining prospector, and uninhabited save for the half-starved camp of the people of Tillie, the Chippewa, Reivers' slave, by the power of the love she bore him.

White men shunned the white wastes of the Dead Lands as, in warmer climes, they shun the unwatered sands of the desert. That was why Reivers sought it. Out there in the camp of Tillie's people he could lie safe, well fed, well nursed, until his wound healed and the strength of his body came back to him. And then . . . .

"Cheer up, Body!" he chuckled as he started northward. "We'll make the world pay bitterly for all of this when we're in shape again. For the present we're going north, going north, going north. You can't stop, Body; you can't lay down. Groan all you want to. You're going to be dragged just as far tonight as if you weren't shot up at all."

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL WHO WAS NOT AFRAID

BREAK of day in Winter time comes to the Dead Lands slowly and without enthusiasm, as if the rosy morning sun wearied at the hopeless landscape which its rays must illumine. Aimless rock formation was a drug on the creation's market the day that the Bad Lands were made. Gigantic boulders, box-like bluffs, ragged rock-spires, cliffs and plateaus of bare rock were in oversupply.

Nature, so a glimpse of the place suggests, had resolved to get rid of a vast surplus of ugly, useless stone, and with one cast of its hands flung them solidly down and made the Dead Lands. There they lie, hog-back, ridge, gully and ravine, hopelessly and aimlessly jumbled and tumbled, a scene of desolate grayness by Summer; by Winter the raw, bleak ridges and spires, thrusting themselves through the covering of snow like unto the bones of a half concealed skeleton.

Daylight crept wearily over the timber belt and spread itself slowly over the barrenness, and struck the highest rise of ground, running crosswise through the barrens, which men called "Hog-Back Ridge." Little by little it lighted up the bleak peaks and tops of ridge and rock-spire.

A wind came with it, a bleak, morning Winter wind which whined as it whipped the dry snow from high places and sent it flying across coulée and valley in the gray light of dawn. Nothing stirred with the coming of daylight. No nocturnal animal, warned of the day's coming, slunk away to its cave; no beast or bird of daylight greeted the morning with movement or song. The gray half-light revealed no living thing of life upon the exposed hump of the ridge.

The sun came, a ball of dull red, rising over the timber line. It touched the topmost spires of rock, sought to gild them

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rosily, gave up as their sullen sides refused to take the color, and turned its rays along the eastern slope. Then something moved. A single speck of life stirred in the vast scene of desolation.

On the bare ground in the lea of a boulder a man sat with his back to the stone and slept. His face was hollow and lined. The corners of his mouth were drawn down as if a weight were hung on each of them, and the thin cheeks, hugging the bones so tightly that the teeth showed through, told that the man had driven himself too far on an empty stomach. Yet, even in sleep, there was a hint of a sardonic smile on the misshapen lips, a smile that condemned and made naught the pain and cruelty of his fate.

The sun crept down the slope of Hog-Back Ridge and found him. It reached his eyes. Its rays had no more warmth than the rays of the cold Winter moon, but its light pierced through the tightly drawn lids. They twitched and finally parted. Reivers awoke without yawning or moving and looked around.

It was the second morning after his flight from Cameron-Dam Camp, and he had yet to reach the Winter camp of the people of Tillie the squaw. Somewhere to the west it lay. He would reach it and reach it in good time, he swore; but he had not had a bite of food in his mouth for two days, and the fever of his wound had sapped heavily his strength.

"Be still, Body," he growled, as with the return of consciousness his belly cried out for food. "You will be fed before life goes out of you."

He rose slowly and stiffly to his knees and looked down the ridge to where the rays of the sun now were illumining the snow-covered bottom of the valley below. The valley ran eastward for a mile or two, and at first glance it was empty and dead, save for the flurries of wind-swept snow, dropping down from the heights above. But Reivers, as he rose to his feet, swept the valley with a second glance, and suddenly he dropped and crouched down close to the ground.

Far down at the lower end of the valley a black speck showed on the frozen snow, and the speck was moving.

Reivers lay on the bare patch of ground, as silent and immovable as the rock above him. The speck was too large to be a single animal and too small to be a pack of traveling caribou.

For several minutes he lay, scarcely breathing, his eyes straining to bring the speck into comprehensible shape. His breath began to come rapidly. Presently he swore. The speck had become two specks now, a long narrow speck and a tiny one which moved beside it, and they were coming steadily up the valley directly toward where he lay.

"One man and a dog-team," mused Reivers. "He won't be traveling here without grub. Body, wake up! You are crying for food. Yonder it comes. Get ready to take it."

Slowly, with long pauses between each movement, and taking care not to place his dark body against the white snow, Reivers dragged himself around to a hiding-place behind the boulder against which he had slept. The sun had risen higher now. Its rays were lighting the valley, and as he peered avidly around one side of the stone, Reivers could make out some detail of the two specks that moved so steadily toward him.

It was a four-dog team, traveling rapidly, and the man, on snow-shoes, traveled beside his team and plied his whip as he strode. Reivers's brows drew down in puzzled fashion. The sledge which whirled behind the running dogs seemed flat and unloaded; the dogs ran in a fashion that told they were strong and fresh. Why didn't the man ride?

Reivers drew back to take stock of the situation. The man might be a stranger, traveling hurriedly through the Dead Lands, or he might be one of the men from Cameron-Dam Camp. If the former, food might be had for a mere hail and the asking; if the latter—Reivers's nostrils widened and he smiled.

Yet a third possibility existed. The man was traveling in strange fashion, running beside an apparently empty sled, and whipping his dogs along. So did men travel when they were fleeing for various reasons, and men fleeing thus do not go unarmed nor take kindly to having the trail of their flight witnessed by casual though starving strangers. Thus there was one chance that a hail and plea for food would be met with a friendly response; two chances that they would be met with lead or steel.

Reivers, not being a careless man, looked

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about for ways and means to place the odds in his favor. A hundred yards to the north of him the valley narrowed into a mere slit between two straight walls of rock. Through this gap the traveler must pass.

When Reivers had crawled to a position on the rock directly above the narrow opening, he lay flat down and grinned in peace. He was securely hidden, and the dog-driver would pass unsuspectingly, unready, thirty feet beneath where he lay. Things were looking well.

The driver and team came on at a steady pace. Even at a great distance, his stride betrayed his race and Reivers muttered, "White man," and pushed to the edge of the bluff a huge, jagged piece of rock. The man might not listen to reason, and Reivers was taking no chances of allowing an opportunity to feed to slip by.

The sleigh still puzzled him. As it came nearer and nearer he saw that it was not empty. Something long and flat lay upon it. Reivers ceased to watch the driver and turned his scrutiny entirely to the bundle upon the sleigh. Minute after minute he watched the sleigh to the exclusion of everything else.

He made out eventually that the bundle was the size and form of a human body. Soon he saw that it moved now and then, as if struggling to rise.

The sleigh came nearer, came into a space where the sunlight, streaming through a gap in the ridge, lighted it up brightly, and Reivers' whole body suddenly stiffened upon the ground and his teeth snapped shut barely in time to cut short an ejaculation of surprise.

The bundle on the sleigh was a woman —a white woman! And she was bound around from ankle to forehead with thongs passed under the sleigh.

"Food—and a woman—a white woman," he mused. "The new life becomes interesting. Body, get ready."

He held the rock balanced on the edge of the cliff, ready to hurl it down with one supreme effort of his waning strength. Hugging the cliff he lay, his head barely raised sufficiently to watch his approaching quarry. He could make out the face of the man by this time, a square face, mostly covered with hair, with the square-cut hair of the head hanging down below the ears. Two fang-like teeth glistened in the sunlight when the man opened his mouth to curse at the dogs, and he turned at times to leer back at the helpless burden on the sleigh.

As he approached the narrow defile, where the rock walls hid a man and what he might do from the eyes of all but the sky above, the man turned to look more frequently, more leeringly at his victim. Reivers saw that the woman was gagged as well as bound.

The driver shouted a command at his dogs, and their lope became a walk, and even as Reivers, up on the cliff, arched his back to hurl his stone, the outfit came to a halt directly beneath where he lay. Reivers waited. He had no compunction about disabling or killing the man below; a crying belly knows no conscience. But he would wait and see what was to develop.

The man swiftly jerked his team back in the traces and turned toward his victim. Reivers, turning his eyes from the man to the woman, received a shock which caused him to hug closer to the cliff. The woman lay helpless on the sleigh, face up. A cloth gag covered her face up to the nose, and a cap, drawn down over the forehead, left only the eyes and nose visible. And the eyes were wide open—very wide open—and they were looking quite calmly and unafraid up at Reivers.

The driver came back and tore the gag from the woman's lips.

"I'll give you a chance," he exploded, and Reivers, up on the cliff, caught the passion-choked note in his voice and again held the stone ready. "I'm stealing you for the chief—for Shanty Moir, the man who's got your father's mine, and who's determined to put shame on you, Red MacGregor's daughter. I'm taking you there to him—in his camp. You know what that means.

"Well, I've changed my mind. I—I'll give you a chance. I'll save you. Come with me. I won't take you up there. We'll go out of the country. You know what it'd mean to go up there. Well, I—I'll marry you."

MANY things happened in the next few seconds. The man threw himself like a wild beast beside the sledge, caught the woman's face in his hands and kissed her bestially upon the helpless lips.

The girl did not struggle or cry out. Only her wide eyes looked up to the top of the cliff, looked questioningly, speculatively,

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calmly. He of the hairy face caught the direction of her look and sprang up and whirled around, the glove flying from his right hand, and a six-shooter leaping into it apparently from nowhere.

His face was upturned, and he fired even as the big rock smote him on the forehead and crushed him shapelessly into the snow. Reivers dragged forward another stone and waited, but the man was too obviously dead to render caution necessary.

"He was experienced and quick," said Reivers to the woman, "but I was too hungry to miss him. Did you think I did it to save you? Oh, ho! Just a minute, till I get down; you'll know me better."

He staggered and fell as he rose to pick his way down, for the cast with the heavy stone had tapped the last reservoirs of his depleted strength, had wrenched open the wounded shoulder and started the blood. Painfully he dragged himself on hands and knees to a snow-covered slope, and slipping and sliding made his way to the valley-bottom and came staggering up to the sledge. The woman to him for the time being did not exist.

"Steady, Body," he muttered, as he tore open the grub-bag on the sleigh. "Here's food."

His fingers fell first on a huge chunk of cooked venison, and he looked no farther. Down in the snow at the side of the helpless woman he squatted and proceeded to eat. Only when the pang in his stomach had been appeased did he look at the woman. Then, for a time, he forgot about eating.

It was not a woman but a girl. Her face was fair and her hair golden red. Her big eyes were looking at him appraisingly. There was no fear in them, no apprehension. She noted the hollowness of his cheeks, the fever in his eyes. Reivers almost dropped his meat in amazement. The girl actually was pitying him!

He stood up, thrust the meat back into the grub-bag and stood swaying and towering over her. The girl's eyes looked back unwaveringly.

"—— you!" growled Reivers as he bent down and loosed the thongs. "What do you mean? Why aren't you afraid?"

"MacGregor Roy was my father," she said quietly. "I am not afraid." She sat up as the bonds fell from her and looked at the still figure in the snow. "He is dead, I suppose?"

"As dead as he tried to make me," sneered Reivers.

A look of annoyance crossed her face.

"Then you have spoiled it all," she broke out, leaping from the sledge. "Spoiled the fine chance I had to find the cave of Shanty Moir, murderer of my father."

Reivers's jaw dropped in amazement, and hot anger surged to his tongue. Many women of many kinds he had looked in the eyes and this was the first one——

"Spoiled it, you red-haired trull! What do you mean? Didn't I save you from our bearded friend yonder. Or—" his thin lips curled into their old contemptuous smile—"or perhaps—perhaps you are one of those to whom such attentions are not distasteful."

The sudden flare and flash of her anger breaking, like lightning out of a Winter's sky, checked his words. The contempt of his smile gave place to a grin of admiration. Tottering and wavering on his feet, he did not stir or raise his arms, though the thin-bladed knife which seemed to spring into her hands as claws protrude from a maddened cat's paws, slipped through his mackinaw and pricked the skin above his heart, before her hand stopped.

" 'Trull' am I? The daughter of MacGregor Roy is a helpless squaw who takes kindly to such words from any man on the trail? Blood o' my father! Pray, you cowardly skulker! Pray!"

His grin grew broader.

"Pretty, very pretty!" he drawled. "But you can't make it good, can you? You thought you could. Your little flare of temper made you feel big. You were sure you were going to stick me. But you couldn't do it. You're a woman. See; your flash of bigness is dying out. You're growing tame. That's one of my specialties—taming spitfires like you. Oh, you needn't draw back. Have no fear. I never did have any taste for red hair."

A painter would have raved about the daughter of MacGregor Roy as she now stood back, facing her tormentor. The fair skin of her face was flushed red, the thin sharp lines of mouth and nostril were tremulous with rage, and her wide, gray eyes burned. Her head was thrown back in scorn, her cap was off; the glorious red-golden hair of her head seemed alive with fury. With one foot advanced, the knife held behind her, her breath coming in angry

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gasps, she stood, a figure passionately, terribly alive in the dead waste of the snows.

"Oh, what a coward you are!" she panted. "You knew I couldn't avenge myself on a sick man. You coward!"

Reivers laughed drunkenly. The fever was blurring his sight, dulling his brain and filling him with an irresistible desire to lie down.

"Yes, I knew it," he mumbled. "I saw it in your eye. You couldn't do it—because I didn't want you to. I want you—I want you to fix me up—hole in the shoulder—fever—understand?"

"I understand that when Duncan Roy, my father's brother, catches up with us he will save me the trouble by putting a hole through your head."

"Plenty of time for that later on." Reivers fought off the stupor and held his senses clear for a moment. "Have you got any whisky?"

"And what if I have?"

"Answer me!" he said icily. "Have you?"

"Duncan Roy has whisky," she replied reluctantly. "He will be on our trail now."

"How long—how long before he'll get here?"

"Yon beast—" she nodded her head toward the still figure in the snow—"raided our camp, struck me down and stole me away with my team two hours before sundown, yestere'en. Duncan Roy was out meat-hunting, and would be back by dark. He'll be two hours behind us, and his dogs travel even with these."

"Two hours? Too long," groaned Reivers and pitched headlong into the snow.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN'S WAY

WHEN he came to, it was from the bite and sting of the terrible white whisky of the North, being poured down his throat by a rude, generous hand.

"Aye; he's no' dead," rumbled a voice like unto a bear's growl. "He lappit the liquor though his eye's closed. Hoot, man! Ye take it in like mother's milk."

"Have done, Uncle Duncan," warned another voice—the bold, free voice of the girl, Reivers in his semi-consciousness made out. "'Tis a sick man. Don't give him the whole bottle."

"Let be, let be," grumbled the big voice, but nevertheless Reivers felt the bottle withdrawn from his lips. "'Tis no tender child that a good drink of liquor would hurt that we have here. Do you not note that mouth and jaw? I'm little more pleased with the look of him than with yon thing in the snow."

"'Tis a sick, helpless being," said the girl.

The big voice rumbled forth an oath.

"And what have we—you and I—to do with sick, helpless beings? Are we not on the trail to find Shanty Moir, who is working your father's mine, wherever it is, and there take vengeance on said Shanty for your father's murder, as well as recover your own property? Is this a trail on which 'tis fit and well we halted to nurse and care for sick, helpless beings? Blood of the de'il! An unlucky mess! What business has man to be sick and ailing on the Winter trail here in the North? 'Tis the law of Nature that such die!"

"And do you think that law will be followed here?" demanded the girl.

"Were I alone, it would," retorted the man. "Our task is to find the place of Shanty Moir and do him justice."

"And the hospitality of the MacGregors? Is it like Duncan Roy to see beast or man needing or wanting help without stretching his hand to help it?"

The man was silent.

"Do you think any good could come to you or me if we turned our hearts to stones and let a sick man perish after he had fallen helpless on our hands?"

"I tell you what I think, Hattie MacGregor," broke out the big voice. "I think there is trouble traveling as trail-fellow with this man. I see trouble in the cut of his jaw and the lines of his mouth. There is a fate written there; he's a fated man and no else, and nothing would please me better than to have him a thousand days mushing away from me and never to see him again. Trouble and trouble! It's written on him plain.

"Who is he? Whence came he? Why is he alone, dogless, foodless, weaponless, here in these Dead Lands! 'Tis uncanny. Blood o' the de'il! He might be dropped down from somewhere, or more like shot up from somewhere—from the black pit, for instance. It's no' proper for mere human being to be found in his condition out this

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far on the barrens, with no sign of how he came or why?"

"Have no fear, Uncle Duncan," laughed the girl. "He's only a common man."

Reivers opened his eyes, chuckling feverishly.

"You'll pay for that 'common,' you spitfire, when I've tamed you," he mumbled.

"Only a common man, Uncle Duncan," repeated the girl steadfastly, "and I've a bone to pick with him when he's on his feet, no longer helpless and pitiable as he is now."

Again Reivers laughed through the haze of fever. He did not have the strength to hold his eyes open, but his mind worked on.

"Helpless! Did you notice the incident of the rock?" he babbled. "Bare, primitive, two-handed man against a man with a gun. Who won?"

"Aye," said the man seriously, "we owe you thanks for that. For a helpless man, you deal stout knocks."

"And speak big words," snapped the girl. "Now, around with the teams, Uncle Duncan, and back to camp. There's been talk enough. We must take him in and shelter and care for him, since he has fallen helpless and pitiable on our hands. We owe him no thanks. Can you not lay his head easier — the boasting fool! There; that's better. Now, all that the dogs can stand, Uncle, for I misdoubt we'll be hard-pressed to keep the life in him till we get him back to camp."

Reivers heard and strove to reply. But the paralysis of fever and weakness was upon him, and all that came from his lips was an incoherent babbling. In the last vapory stages of consciousness he realized that he was being placed more comfortably upon the sledge, that his head was being lifted and that blankets were being strapped about him.

He felt the sledge being turned, heard the runners grate on the snow; then ensued an easy, sliding movement through space, as the rested dogs started their lope back through the valley. The movement soothed him. It lulled him to a sensation of safety and comfort.

The phantasmagoria of fever pounded at his brain, his eyes and ears, but the steady, swishing rush of the sleigh drove them away. He slept, and awoke when a halt was called and more whisky forced down his throat. Then he slept again.

There were several halts. Once he realized that he was being fed thin soup, made from cooked venison and snow-water. That was the last impression made on remaining consciousness. After that the thread snapped.

The sledges went on. They left the valley. Through the jumbled ridges of the Dead Lands they hurried. They reached a stretch of stunted fir, and still they continued to go. At length they pulled up before a solid little cabin built in a cleft of rocks.

The Snow Burner was carried in and put to bed. After a rest Duncan Roy and the fresher of the dog-teams took the trail again. They came back after a day and a night, bringing with them a certain Père Batiste, skilled in treating fevers and wounds of the body as well as of the soul. The good curé gasped at the torso which revealed itself to his gaze as he stripped off the clothes to work at the wound.

"If *le bon Dieu* made him as well inside as outside, this is a very good man," he said simply; and Duncan MacGregor smiled grimly.

"God—or the de'il—made him to deal stout knocks, that's sure," he grunted. " 'Tis a rare animal we have stripped before us."

"A rare human being—a soul," reproved Father Batiste. "And it is *le bon Dieu* who makes us all."

"But the de'il gets hold of some very young," insisted the Scotchman.

Father Batiste stayed in the cabin for two days.

"He was not meant to die this time," he said later. "It will be long—weeks perhaps —before he will be strong enough to take the trail. He will need care, such care as only a woman can give him. If he does not have this care he will die. If he does have it he will live. *Adieu*, my children; you have a sacred, human life in your hands."

And he got the care that only a woman could give him. For the next two weeks Duncan MacGregor watched his niece's devoted nursing and gnawed his red beard gloomily.

"Trouble — trouble — trouble!" he muttered over and over to himself. "It rides around the man's head like a storm-cap. Hattie MacGregor, take care. Yon man will be a different creature to handle when he has the strength back in his body."

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AT THE end of a week Reivers awoke as a man wakes after a long, fever-breaking slumber, weak and wasted, yet with a grateful sense of comfort and well-being. Before he opened his eyes he sensed by the warmth and odors of the air that he was in a small, tight room, and in a haze he fancied that he had fallen in the tepee of Tillie, the squaw. Then he remembered. He opened his eyes.

He was lying in a bunk, raised high from the floor, and above the foot of the bed was a small window, shaded by a frilled white curtain. Reivers lay long and looked at the curtain before his eyes moved to further explore the room. For once, long, long ago, he had belonged in a world where white frilled curtains and frills of other kinds were not an exception.

In his physically washed-out condition his memory reached back and pictured that world with uncanny clearness, and he turned from the curtain with a frown of annoyance to look straight into the eyes of Duncan Roy, who sat by the fireplace across the room and studied him from beneath shaggy red brows.

Reivers looked the man over idly at first, then with a considerable interest and appreciation. Sitting crouched over on a low stone bench, with the light of the fire and of the sun upon him, MacGregor resembled nothing so much as an old red-haired bear. He was short of leg and bow-legged, but his torso and head were enormous. His arms, folded across the knees, were bear-like in length and size, and his hair and beard flamed golden red.

There was no friendliness in the small, gray eyes which regarded Reivers so steadily. Duncan MacGregor was no man to hide his true feelings. Reivers looked inquiringly around.

"She's stepped outside to feed the dogs," said MacGregor, interpreting the look. "You'll have to put up with my poor company for the time being."

"I accept your apology," said Reivers and turned comfortably toward the wall.

A deep, chesty chuckle came from the fireside.

"Man, whoever are you or whatever are you, to take it that Duncan MacGregor feels any need to apologize to you?"

The words were further balm to Reivers's new-found feeling of comfort and content.

"Say that again, please," he requested drowsily.

Laughingly the giant by the fire repeated his query.

"Good!" murmured Reivers. "I just wanted to be sure that you didn't know who I am—or, rather, who I was?"

"Blood o' the de'il!" laughed the Scotchman. "So it's that, is it? Tell me, how much reward is there offered for you, dead or alive? I'm a thrifty man, lad, and you hardly look like a man who'd have a small price on his head."

"Wrong, quite wrong, my suspicious friend," said Reivers. "I see you've the simple mind of the man who's spent much time in lone places. You jump at the natural conclusion. When you know me better you'll know that that won't apply to me."

"Well," drawled the Scotchman good-naturedly, "I do not say that it looks suspicious to be found a two-days' march out in the Dead Lands, without food, dog, or weapons, with an empty belly and a hole through the shoulder, but there are people who might draw the conclusion that a man so fixed was traveling because some place behind him was mighty bad for his health. But I have no doubt you have an explanation? No doubt 'tis quite the way you prefer to travel?"

"Under certain circumstances, it is," said Reivers.

"Aye; under certain circumstances. Such as an affair with a 'Redcoat,' for instance."

"Wrong again, my simple-minded friend. You're quite welcome to bring the whole Mounted Police here to look me over. I'm not on their lists, or the lists of any authority in the world, as 'wanted.' "

"For that insult—that I'm of the kind that bears tales to the police—I'll have an accounting with you later on," said MacGregor sharply. "For the rest—you'll admit that you're under some small obligation to us—will you be kind enough to explain what lay behind you that you should be out on the barrens in your condition? I'll have you know that I am no man to ask pay for succoring the sick or wounded. Neither am I the man to let any well man be near-speaking with my ward and niece, Hattie MacGregor, without I know what's the straight of him."

Reivers turned luxuriously in his bunk and regarded his inquisitor with a smile.

"Poor, dainty, helpless, little lady!" he

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mocked. "So weak and frail that she needs a protector. Never carries anything more than an eight-inch knife up her sleeve. You do right, MacGregor; your niece certainly needs looking after. She certainly doesn't know how to take care of herself.

"But about obligations, I don't quite agree with you. Didn't you owe me a little something for that turn with the bearded fellow? Not that I did it to save the girl," he continued loudly, as he heard the door open behind him and knew that Hattie MacGregor had entered. "What was she to me? Nothing! But I was hungry. I needed food. But for that our black-bearded friend might now have been wandering care-free over the snows, a red-haired woman still strapped to his sledge, his taste seeming to run to that color, which mine does not."

Hattie MacGregor stilled her uncle's retort with a shake of her golden-red head, crossed to the fireplace and took up a bowl that was simmering there, and approached the bed. Reivers looked at her closely, striving to catch her eye, but she seated herself beside him without apparently paying the slightest attention. She spoke no word, made no sign to welcome him back from his unconsciousness, but merely held a spoonful of the steaming broth up to his lips.

There was a certain dexterity in her movements which told that she had performed this action many, many times before, and there was nothing in her manner to indicate her sensibility of the change in his condition. Reivers opened his mouth to laugh, and the girl dexterously tilted the contents of the spoon down his throat.

"You fool!" he sputtered, half strangling.

He strove to rise, but her round, warm arm held him down. Over by the fireplace Duncan MacGregor slapped his thigh and chuckled deep down in his hairy throat, but on the face of his niece there was only the determined patience of the nurse dealing with a patient not yet entirely responsible for his behavior.

She was not surprised at his outbreak, Reivers saw. Apparently she had fed him many times just so—he utterly helpless and childish, she capable and calm. Apparently she was determined to sit there, firm and patient, until he was ready to take his broth quietly and without fuss.

Indignantly he raised his hands to take the bowl from her; then he opened his eyes wide in surprise. He was so weak that he could barely lift his arms, and when she offered him a second spoonful he swallowed it without further demur.

"Ah, well, we'll soon be able to take the trail again," drawled MacGregor mockingly. "We're getting strong now; soon we'll be able to eat with our own hands."

"Hold tongue, Uncle," snapped the girl, and continued to feed her patient.

"I suppose I must thank you?" taunted Reivers, when the bowl was empty.

Hattie MacGregor made no sign to indicate that she had heard. She put the bowl away, felt Reivers' pulse, laid her hand upon his forehead—never looking at him the while—arranged the pillows under his head, tucked him in and without speaking went out. Reivers' eyes followed her till the door closed behind her.

"The little spitfire!" he growled in grudging admiration; and Duncan MacGregor, by the fire, laughed till the room echoed.

CHAPTER IV

GOLD!

NEXT morning when she came to feed him Reivers angrily reached for the bowl. He was stronger than the day before, and he held his hands forth without trembling.

"There's no need of your feeding me by hand any longer," said he. "I assure you I'll enjoy my food much better alone than I do with you feeding me."

The girl seated herself at the bunk-side, holding the bowl out of his reach, and looked him quietly in the eyes. It was the first time she had appeared to notice his return to consciousness, and Reivers smiled quizzically at her scrutiny. She did not smile in return, merely studied him as if he were an interesting subject.

In the gray light of morning Reivers for the first time saw her with eyes cleared of the fever blur. His smile vanished, for he saw that this woman, to him, was different from any woman he ever had known before. And he had known many.

In her wide gray eyes there rode a sorrow that reached out and held the observer, despite her evident efforts to keep it hidden. But the mouth belied the eyes. It was set with an expression of determination,

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almost superhuman, almost savage. It was as if this girl, just rounding her twenties, had turned herself into a force for the accomplishment of an object. The mouth was harsh, almost lipless, in its set. Yet, beneath all this, the woman in Hattie MacGregor was obvious, soft, yearning.

Many women had had a part in Reivers' life—far too many. None of them had held his interests longer than for a few months; none of them had he failed to tame and break. And none of them had reached below the hard husk of him and touched the better man as Hattie MacGregor did at this moment. His past experiences, his past attitude toward women, his past manner of life, flashed through his mind, each picture bringing with it a stab of remorse.

Remorse! The Snow Burner remorseful! He laughed his old laugh of contempt and defiance of all the world, but, though he refused to acknowledge it to himself, the old, invincible, self-assured ring was not in it. This girl was not to him what other women had been, and he saw that he could not tame her as he had tamed them.

Strange thoughts rose in his mind. He wished that the past had been different. He actually felt unworthy. Well, the past was past. It had died with him in the river. He was beginning a new life, a new name, a new man. Why couldn't he? He drove the weak thoughts away. What nonsense! He—Hell-Camp Reivers—getting soft over a woman? Pooh!

"I said I could feed myself," he snarled. "Give me that bowl. I don't want you around."

For reply she dipped the spoon into the food and held it ready.

"Lie down quietly, please," she said coldly. "This is no time for keeping up your play of being a big man."

"Give me that bowl," he commanded.

"Uncle," she called quietly.

Her big kinsman came lurching in from the other room of the cabin.

"Aye, lass?" said he.

"It looks as if we would have to obey Father Batiste's directions and feed him by force," said the girl quietly. "He has come out of the fever, but he hasn't got his senses back. He thinks of feeding himself. Do you get the straps, Uncle. You recollect Father Batiste's orders."

Duncan MacGregor scratched his hairy head in puzzled fashion.

"How now, stranger?" he growled. "Can you no take your food in peace?"

"I can take it without anybody's help," insisted Reivers. He knew that the situation was ridiculous, but he saw no way of getting the whip-hand.

"It was the word of the good Father, without whom you would now be resting out in the snow with a cairn of rock over you, that you should be fed so much and so little for some days after your senses come back," said MacGregor slowly. "I do not ken the right of it quite, but the lass does. The lass—she'll have her way, I suspect. I can do naught but obey her orders."

"Get the straps," commanded the girl curtly.

Reivers glared at her, but she looked back without the least losing her self-possession or determination.

"You'll pay for this!" he snorted.

"Will you take your food without the straps?" said she.

For a minute their eyes met in conflict.

"Oh, don't be ridiculous," snapped Reivers. "Have your silly way."

"Good. That's a good boy," she said softly; and Duncan Roy ran from the room choking.

"You see," she continued, as he swallowed the first spoonful, "it isn't always possible to have your own way, is it? I am doing this only for your own good."

"Hold your tongue," he growled. "I've got to eat this food, but I don't have to listen to your talk."

"Quite right," she agreed, and the meal was finished in silence.

At noon she fed him again, without speaking a word. Apparently she had given her uncle orders likewise to refrain from talking to Reivers, for not a word did he speak during the day.

In the evening the same silent feeding took place. After she and her uncle had supped, they drew up to the fireplace, where, in silence, Duncan repaired a dog-harness while the girl sewed busily at a fur coat. At short intervals the uncle cast a look toward Reivers's bunk, then choked a chuckle in his beard, each chuckle bringing a glance of reproof from his niece.

"No, Hattie," MacGregor broke out finally, "I cannot hold tongue any longer. Company is no' so plentiful in the North that we can sit by and have no speech. Do you keep still if you wish—I must talk.

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Stranger, are you going to tell me about yoursel', as I asked you yestereve?"

"Does her Royal Highness, the Red-Headed Chieftainess, permit me to speak?" queried Reivers sarcastically.

" 'Twas your own sel' told me to hold tongue," said the girl evenly, without looking up. "I am glad to see you are reasonable enough to give in."

"Let be, Hattie," grumbled the old man. "He's our guest, and we in his debt. Stranger, who are you?"

"Nobody," said Reivers.

"Ah!" cried the girl. "Now he's come to his senses, sure enough."

"Hattie!" said the old man ominously. "I beg pardon for her uncivility, stranger."

"Never mind," said Reivers lightly. "Apparently she doesn't know any better. Speaking to you, sir, I am nobody. I'm as much nobody as a child born yesterday. My life—as far as you're concerned—began up there on the rocks in the Dead Lands.

"I died just a few days before that—died as effectively as if a dozen preachers had read the service over me. You don't understand that. You've got a simple mind. But I tell you I'm beginning a new life as completely as if there was no life behind me, and as you know all that's happened in this new life, you see there's nothing for me to tell you about myself."

"You died," repeated the old man slowly. "I'll warrant you had a good reason."

"A fair one. I wanted to live. I died to save my life."

"Speak plain!" growled MacGregor. "You were not fleeing from the law?"

"No—as I told you yesterday. The only law I was fleeing from was the good old one that cheap men make when they become a mob."

"I tak' it they had a fair reason for becoming a mob?"

"The best in the world," agreed Reivers. "They wanted to kill me. Now, why they wanted to do that is something that belongs in my other life—with the other man—has nothing at all to do with this man—with me—and therefore I am not going to tell you anything about it, except this: I didn't come away with anything that belonged to them, except possibly my life."

MacGregor nodded sagely as Reivers ended.

"And his own bare life a man has a right to get away with if he can, even though it's properly forfeited to others," he said. "I suppose you have, or had, a name?"

"I did. I haven't now; I haven't thought of one that would please me."

"How would the 'Woman Tamer' suit you?" asked the girl, without pausing in her sewing. "You remember you told me one of your specialties was taming spitfires like me?"

Reivers smiled.

"I am glad to see that you've become sufficiently interested in me, Miss MacGregor, to select me a name."

"Interested!" she flared; then subsided and bent over her sewing. "I will speak no more, Uncle," she said meekly.

"Good!" sneered Reivers. "Your manners are improving. And now, Mr. MacGregor, what about yourselves, and your brother, and a mine, and a man named Moir that I've heard you speak of?"

Duncan MacGregor tossed a fresh birch chunk into the fire and carefully poked the coals around it. Outside, the dogs, burrowing in the snow, sent up to the sky their weird night-cry, a cry of prayer and protest, protest against the darkness and mystery of night, prayer for the return of the light of day. A wind sprang up and whipped dry snow against the cabin window, and to the sound of its swishing wail Duncan MacGregor began to speak.

"LITTLE as you've seen fit to tell about yourself, stranger," he said, " 'tis plain from your behavior out on the rocks that you're no man of that foul Welsh cutthroat and thief, Shanty Moir. For the manner in which you dealt with yon man, we owe you a debt."

"We owe him nothing," interrupted the niece. "Had he not interfered, I would have found the way to Shanty Moir."

"But as how?"

"What matter as how? What matter what happens to me if I could find what has become of my father and bring justice to the head of Shanty Moir?"

MacGregor shook his head.

"We owe you a debt," he continued, speaking to Reivers, "and can not refuse to tell you how it is with us. It is no pleasant situation we are in, as you may have judged. My brother, father of Hattie, is—or was, we do not know which—James MacGregor, 'Red' MacGregor so-called in this land, therefore MacGregor Roy, as is all our

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breed. You would have heard of him did you belong in this country.

"Ten year ago we built this cabin, he and I, and settled down to trap the country, for the fur here is good. Five year ago a Cree half-breed gave James a sliver of rock to weight a net with, and the rock, curse it forever, was over half gold. The breed could not recall where the rock had come from, save that he had chucked it into his canoe some place up north.

"James MacGregor stopped trapping then. He began to look for the spot where the gilty rock came from. Three years he looked and did not find it. Two years ago Shanty Moir came down the river and bided here, and Moir was a prospector among other things. Together they found it, after nearly two years looking together; for James took this Moir into partnership, and that was the unlucky day of his life."

MacGregor kicked savagely at the fire and sat silent for several minutes.

"Six months gone they found it," he continued dully, "in the Summer time. They came in for provisions—for provisions for all Winter. A deposit for two men to work, they said. My brother would not even tell me where they found it. The gold had got into his brain. It was his life's blood to him. We only knew that it was somewhere up yonder."

He embraced the whole North with a despairing sweep of his long arms and continued:

"Then they went back, five months, two weeks gone, to dig out the gold, the two of them, my brother James, and the foul Welsh thief, Shanty Moir. For foul he has proven. In three months my brother had promised he would be back to say all was well with him. We have had no word, no word in these many months.

"But Shanty Moir we have heard of. Ay, we have heard of him. At Fifty Mile, and at Dumont's Camp he has been, throwing dust and nuggets across the bars and to the painted women, boasting he is king of the richest deposit in the North, and offering to kill any man who offers to follow his trail to his holdings. Aye, that we have heard. And that must mean only one thing—the cut-throat Moir has done my brother to death and is flourishing on the gold that drew James MacGregor to his doom.

"Well," he went on harshly, "what men have found others can find. We have sent word broadcast that we will find Shanty Moir and his holdings, and that I will have an accounting with him, aye, an accounting that will leave but one of us above ground, if it takes me the rest of my life."

"And mine," interjected the girl hotly. "Shanty Moir is mine, and I take toll for my father's life. It's no matter what comes to me, if I can bring justice to Shanty Moir for what he has done to my father. My hand—my own hand will take toll when we run the dog to earth."

In his bunk Reivers laughed scornfully.

"I've a good notion to go hunting this Moir and bring him to you just to see if you could make those words good," said he. "With your own hand, eh? You'd fail, of course, at the last moment, being a woman, but it would almost be worth while getting this Moir for you to see what you'd do. Yes, it would be an interesting experiment."

It was the girl's turn to laugh now, her laughter mocking his.

"'Twould be interesting to see what you would do did you stand face to face with Shanty Moir," she sneered. "Yes, 'twould be an interesting experiment—to see how you'd crawl. For this can be said of the villain, Shanty Moir, that he does not run from men to get help from women. You bring Shanty Moir in! How would you do it—with your mouth?"

"On second thought it would be cruel and unusual punishment to make any man listen to your tongue," concluded Reivers solemnly.

MacGregor growled and shook his head.

"There's no doubt that Shanty Moir of the black heart is a hard-grown, experienced man," said he. "Henchmen of his—three of them, Welshmen all—came through here while James and he were hunting the mine, and he treated them like dogs and they him like a chieftain. 'Twas one of them you slew with the rock out yon, and the matter is very plain: Shanty Moir has got word to them and they have come to the mine and overpowered my brother James. You may judge of the strong hand he holds over his men when a single one of them dares to raid my camp in my absence and steal the daughter of James MacGregor for his chieftain—a strong, big man. 'Twill make it all the sweeter when we get him. He will die hard."

"Also—being of a thrifty breed—you

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won't feel sorry at getting hold of whatever gold he's taken out," suggested Reivers.

"That's understood," said MacGregor, and put a fresh chunk on the fire for the night.

CHAPTER V

THE LOOK IN A WOMAN'S EYES

NEXT morning Hattie MacGregor, after she had fed him his morning's meal, said casually to Reivers:

"You have about six days more to pump my uncle and get all he knows about my father's mine. In six days you should be strong enough to travel, and so long and no longer do I keep you."

"Six days?" repeated Reivers. "I may take it into my head to start before."

"And that's all the good that would do you," she replied promptly. "You don't go from here until you are firm on your feet, and that will be six days, about."

"Your interest flatters me," he mocked.

"Interest!" Her laugh was bitter. "No stray, wounded cur even goes from this camp till he's fit to rustle a living on the trail. I could do no less even for you."

"And if I should make up my mind and go?"

"I would shoot you if necessary to keep you here till my duty by you is done!"

"You spitfire!" laughed Reivers, hiding the admiration that leaped into his eyes. "And what makes you think I'm going hunting for this alleged mine when I depart from your too warm hospitality?"

"Pooh! 'Tis easy enough to see that you're that kind—you with your long, hungry nose! I was watching you when my uncle babbled away last night. You've naught a thing in the world but the clothes you stand in. What would you do but go snooping around when you hear of gold? I see it in your mean eyes. Well, seek all you please. You're welcome. You'll not interfere with our quest. In the first place, you have not the heart to stay on the trail long enough to succeed; in the second, you'd back-track quick enough did you once come face to face with Shanty Moir."

"And you—I suppose this bad man, Shanty Moir, will quail when he sees your red hair? Or perhaps you expect to charm him as you charmed the gentleman who had you tied on the sledge?"

"I do not know that," she said without irritation. "But I do know that my uncle and I will run Shanty Moir to earth, and that he will pay in full for the wrong he has done."

"You silly, childish fool!" he broke out. "Haven't you brains enough to realize what an impossible wild-goose chase you're on? Since it took your father five years to find the mine, you ought to realize that it's pretty hard to locate. Since he didn't find it until this Moir, a prospector, came to help him, you ought to understand that it takes a miner to find it.

"You're no miner. Your uncle is no miner. You've neither of you had the slightest experience in this sort of thing. You wouldn't know the signs if you saw them. You'll go wandering aimlessly around, maybe walking over Shanty Moir's head; because, since nobody has stumbled across his camp, it must be so well hidden that it can't be seen unless you know right where to look. Find it! You're a couple of children!"

"Mayhap. But we are not so aimless as you may think. We go to Fifty Mile and to Dumont's Camp and stay. Sooner or later Shanty Moir will come there, to throw my father's gold over the bars and to worse. It may be a month, a year—it doesn't make any difference. But I suppose a great man like you has a quicker and surer way of doing it?"

"I have," said Reivers.

"No doubt. I could see your eyes grow greedy when you heard my uncle tell of gold."

"Oh, no; not especially," taunted Reivers. "The gold is an incident. Shanty Moir is what interests me. He seems to be a gentleman of parts. I'm going to get him. I'm going to bring you face to face with him. I want to see if you could make good the strong talk you've been dealing out as to what you would do. You interest me that way, Miss MacGregor, and that way only. It will be an interesting experiment to get you Shanty Moir."

"Thank Heaven!" she said grimly. "We'll soon be rid of you and your big talk. Then I can forget that any man gave me the name you gave me and lived to brag about it afterward."

He laughed, as one laughs at a petulant child.

"You will never forget me," he said.

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"You know that you will not forget me, if you live a thousand years."

"I have forgotten better men than you," she said and went out, slamming the door.

That evening Reivers sat up by the fire and further plied old MacGregor with questions concerning the mine.

"You say that your brother claimed the mine lay to the north," he said. "I suppose you have searched the north first of all?"

"For a month I have done nothing else," was the reply. "I have not gone far enough north. My brother James said it lay north from here; and 'twas north he and Shanty Moir went when they started on their last trip together, from which my brother did not return or send word."

"Dumont's Camp and Fifty Mile, where Moir's been on sprees, lay to the west."

"Northwest, aye. Four days' hard mushing to Fifty Mile. Dumont's hell-hole's a day beyond."

"And you think the mine lies to the north of that?"

"Aye. More like in a direc tline north of here, for 'twas so they went when they left here."

Reivers hid the smile of triumph that struggled on his lips. The Dead Lands were strange country to him, but in the land north of Fifty Mile he was at home. In his wanderings he had spent months in that country in company with many other deluded men who thought to dig gold out of the bare, frozen tundra. He had found no gold there, and neither had any one else. There was no gold up there, could be none there, and, what was more important to him just now, there was no rock formation, nothing but muskeg and tundra. The mine could not be up north.

It must, however, be within easy mushing distance of Fifty Mile and Dumont's camp, say two or three days, else Shanty Moir would not have hied himself to these settlements when the need for riot and wassail overcame him.

"You know the ground between here and Fifty Mile, I suppose?" he said suddenly.

" 'Tis my trapping-ground," replied MacGregor.

So the mine couldn't be east of the settlements. It was to the west or the south.

"Your brother was particularly careful to keep the location of his find secret even from you?"

"Aye," said MacGregor sorrowfully. "It had gone to his head, he had searched so long, and the find was so big. He took no chances that I might know it, or his daughter Hattie; only the thief, Shanty Moir."

And he said that the mine lay to the north. That might mean that it lay to the south—west or south of the settlements, there his search would lie. It was new country to him, and, as MacGregor well knew before he gave him his confidence, a man not knowing the land might wander aimlessly for years without covering those vast, broken reaches. But MacGregor did not know of the Chippewa squaw, Tillie, and her people.

"And now I suppose you will be able to find it soon," snapped Hattie MacGregor, "now that you have pumped my uncle dry?"

"I will," said Reivers. "I'll be there waiting for you when you come along." And Duncan MacGregor chuckled deeply.

FOR the remainder of his stay at the cabin, Reivers maintained a sullen silence toward the girl. Had she been different, had she affected him differently, he would have cursed her for daring to disturb him even to this slight extent. But he knew that if she had been different she would not have disturbed him at all. Well, he would soon be away, and then he would forget her.

He had an object again. His nature was such that he craved power and dominance over men, as another man craves food. He would not live at all unless he had power. He had used this power too ruthlessly at Cameron-Dam Camp, and it had been wrested from him. For the time being he was down among the herd. But not for long.

Shanty Moir had a mine some place south or west of the settlements, and the mine yielded gold nuggets and gold dust for Shanty Moir to fling across the bars. Gold spells power. Given gold, Reivers would have back his old-time power over men, aye, and over women. Not merely a power up there in the frozen North, but in the world to which he had long ago belonged: the world of men in dress clothes, of lights and soft rugs, or women, soft-speaking women, shimmery gowns and white shoulders, their eyes and apparel a constant invitation to the great adventure of love.

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After all, that was the world that he belonged in. And gold would give him power there, and in that whirl he would forget this red-haired, semi-savage who looked him in the eye as no other woman ever had dared. His fists clenched as his thoughts lighted up the future. The Snow Burner had died, but he would live again, and he would forget, absolutely and completely, Hattie MacGregor.

On the morning of the sixth day Duncan MacGregor gravely placed before him outside the cabin door a pair of light snow-shoes and a grub-bag filled with food for four days. Reivers strapped on the snow-shoes and ran his arms through the bag-straps without a word.

"Stranger," said MacGregor, holding out his hand, "I did not like you when first I saw you. I do not say I like you now. But—shake hands."

Reivers hurriedly shook hands and tore himself away. He had resolved to go without seeing Hattie, and he was inwardly raging at himself because he found this resolution hard to keep. He laid his course for the nearest rise of land, half a mile away. Once over the rise the cabin would be shut out of sight, and even though he should weaken and look back there would be no danger of letting her see.

Bent far over, head down, lunging along with the cunning strides of the trained snow-shoer, he topped the rise and dropped down on the farther side. There he paused to rest himself and draw breath, and as he stood there Hattie MacGregor and her dog-team swept at right angles across his trail.

She was riding boy-fashion, half sitting, half lying, on the empty sledge, driving the dogs furiously for their daily exercise. She did not speak. She merely looked up at him as she went past. Then she was gone in a flurry of snow, and Reivers went forth on his quest of power with a curse on his lips and in his heart the determination that no weakening memories of a girl's wistful eyes should interfere with his aim.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE TRAIL OF FORTUNE

REIVERS traveled steadily for an hour at the best pace that was in him. It was not a good pace, for he was far from being in his old physical condition, and the lift and swing of a snow-shoe will cramp the calves and ankle-tendons of a man grown soft from long bed-lying, no matter how cunning may be his stride.

He swore a little at first over his slow progress. He was like a wolf, suddenly released from a trap, who desires to travel far, swiftly and instantly, and who finds that the trap has made him lame.

Reivers wanted to put the MacGregor cabin, and the scenes about it, which might remind him of Hattie, behind him with a rush. But the rush, he soon found, threatened to cripple him, so he must perforce give it up. The trail that he had set out to make was not one that any man, least of all one recently convalescent, could hope to cover in a single burst of speed.

He was going to the Winter camp of the people of Tillie, the squaw. The camp lay somewhere in the northwest. How far away he did not know; and it was no part of his plans to arrive at the camp of the Chippewas depleted in energy and resource. The rôle he had set out to play now called for the character of the Snow Burner at his best—dominant, unconquerable. Therefore, when he found that his first efforts at speed threatened to cripple him with the treacherous snow-shoe cramp, he resigned himself to a pace which would have shamed him had he been in good condition. It was poor snow-shoeing, but at the end of an hour he had placed between himself and all possible sight of Hattie MacGregor the first ragged rock-ramparts of the Dead Lands, and he was content.

On the western slope of a low ridge he unstrapped his snow-shoes and sat down on a bare boulder for a rest. His heart throbbed nervously from his exertion and his lungs gasped weakly. But with each breath of the crisp air his strength was coming back to him, and in his head the brains of the Snow Burner worked as of old. He smiled with great self-satisfaction. He was not considering his condition, was not counting the difficulties that lay in his path. He was merely picturing, with lightning-like play of that powerful mental machinery of his, the desperate nature of the adventure toward which he was traveling.

It was desperate enough even to thrill Hell-Camp Reivers. For probably never did born adventurer set forth of his own free will on a more deadly, more hopeless-looking trail. As he sat on the rock there in

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the Dead Lands, Reivers was in better condition than on his flight from Cameron-Dam Camp to this extent: the bullet-hole in his shoulder was healed, and he had recuperated from the fever brought on by exposure and exhaustion. That was all. He was still the bare man with empty hands. He possessed nothing in the world but the clothes he stood in, the food on his back and the gift snow-shoes on his feet.

He had not even a knife that might be called a weapon, for the case-knife that old MacGregor had given him upon parting could scarcely be reckoned such. In this condition he was setting forth—first, to find a cunningly hidden mine; second, to take it and keep it for his own from one Shanty Moir, who treated his henchmen like dogs and was looked up to as a chieftain.

The Snow Burner lived again as he contemplated the possibilities of a clash with Moir. If what the MacGregors had said was true, Shanty Moir was a boss man himself. And as instinctively and eagerly as one ten-pronged buck tears straight through timber, swamp and water to battle with another buck whose deep-voiced challenge proclaims him similarly a giant, so Reivers was going toward Shanty Moir.

He leaped to his feet, with flashing eyes, at the thought of what was coming. Then he remembered his weakened condition and sat down again. For the immediate present, until his full strength returned, he must make craft take the place of strength.

When he was ready to start again, Reivers took his bearings from the sun, it being a clear day, and laid his trail as straight toward the northwest as the formation of the Dead Lands would allow. He slept that night by a hot spring. A tiny rivulet ran unfrozen from the spring southward down into the maze of barren stone, a thread of dark, steaming water, wandering through the white, frozen snow.

Had he been a little less tried with the day's march Reivers might have paid more attention to this phenomenon that evening. In the morning he awoke with such eagerness to be on toward his adventure that he marched off without bestowing on the stream more than a casual glance. And later he came to curse his carelessness.

Bearing steadily toward the northwest, his course lay in the Dead Lands for the greater part of the day. Shortly before sundown he saw with relief that ahead the rocks and ridges gave way to the flat tundra, with small clumps of stunted willows dotting the flatness, like tiny islands in a sea of snow.

Reivers quickened his pace. Out on the tundra he hurried straight to the nearest bunch of willows. Even at a distance of several rods the chewed white branches of the willows told him their story, and he gave vent to a shout of relief. The caribou had been feeding there. The Chippewas lived on the caribou in Winter. He had only to follow the trail of the animals and he would soon run across the moccasin tracks of his friends, the Indians.

Luck favored him more than he hoped for. At his shout there was a crash in a clump of willows a hundred yards ahead and a bull caribou lumbered clumsily into the open. At the sight of him the beast snorted loudly and turned and ran. From right and left came other crashes, and in the gathering dusk the herd which had been stripping the willows fled in the wake of the sentinel bull, their ungainly gait whipping them out of sight and hearing in uncanny fashion.

Reivers smiled. The camp of Tillie's people would not be far from the feeding-ground of the caribou. He ate his cold supper, crawled into the shelter of the willows and went to sleep.

DRY, drifting snow half hid the tracks of the caribou during the night, and in the morning he was forced to wait for the late-coming daylight before picking up the trail. The herd had gone straight westward, and Reivers followed the signs, his eyes constantly scanning the snow for moccasin tracks or other evidence of human beings.

In the middle of the forenoon, in a birch and willow swamp, he jumped the animals again. They caught his scent at a mile's distance, and Reivers crouched down and watched avidly as they streaked from the swamp to security.

To the north of the swamp lay the open, snow-covered tundra, where even the knife-like fore-hoof of the caribou would have hard time to dig out a living in the dead of Winter. To the south lay clumps of brush and stunted trees, ideal shelter and feed.

The animals went north. Reivers nodded in great satisfaction. There were wolves or Indians to the south, probably the latter.

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Accordingly he turned southward. Toward noon he found his first moccasin track, evidently the trail of a single hunter who had come northward, but not quite far enough, on a hunt for caribou.

The track looped back southward and Reivers trailed it. Soon a set of snow-shoe tracks joined the moccasins, and Reivers, after a close scrutiny had revealed the Chippewa pattern in the snow, knew that he was on the right track. The tracks dropped down on to the bed of a solidly frozen river and continued on to the south.

Other tracks became visible. When they gathered together and made a hard-packed trail down the middle of the river, Reivers knew that a camp was not far away, and grew cautious.

He found the camp as the swift Winter darkness came on, a group of half a dozen tepees set snugly in a bend of the river, one large tepee in the middle easily recognizable as that of Tillie, the squaw, chief of the band.

Reivers sat down to wait. Presently he heard the camp-dogs growling and fighting over their evening meal and knew that they would be too occupied to notice and announce the approach of a stranger. Also, at this time the people of the camp would be in their tepees, supping heavily if the hunter's god had been favorably inclined, and gnawing the cold bones of yesterday if that irrational deity had been unkind.

By the whining note in the growls of the dogs, Reivers judged that the latter was the case this evening; and when he moved forward and stood listening outside the flap of the big tepee he knew that it was so. Within, an old squaw's treble rose faintly in a whining chant, of which Reivers caught the despairing motif:

Black is the face of the sun, Ah wo!
The time has come for the old to die. Ah wo, ah wo!
There is meat only to keep alive the young. Ah wo!
We who are old must die. Ah wo! Ah wo! Ah wo!

Any other white man but Reivers would have shuddered at the terrible, primitive story which the wail told. Reivers smiled. His old luck was with him. The camp was short of meat and the hunters had given up hopes of making a kill.

With deft, experienced fingers he unloosed the flap of the tepee. There was no noise. Suddenly the old squaw's wail ceased; those in the tepee looked up from their scanty supper. The Snow Burner was standing inside the tepee, the flap closed behind him.

There were six people in the tepee, the old squaw, an old man, two young hunters, a young girl, and Tillie. They were gathered around the fire-stone in the center, making a scant meal of frozen fish. Tillie, by virtue of her position, had the warmest place and the most fish.

No one spoke a word as they became aware of his presence. Only on Tillie's face there came a look in which the traces of hunger vanished. Reivers stood looking down at the group for a moment in silence. Then he strode forward, thrust Tillie to one side and sat down in her place. For Reivers knew Indians.

"Feed me," he commanded, tossing his grub-bag to her.

He did not look at her as she placed before him the entire contents of the bag. Having served him she retired and sat down behind him, awaiting his pleasure. Reivers ate leisurely of the bountiful supply of cold meat that remained of his supply. When he had his fill he tossed small portions to the old squaw, the old man and the young girl.

"Hunters are mighty," he mocked in the Chippewa tongue, as the young men avidly eyed the meat. "They kill what they eat. The meat they do not kill would stick in their mighty throats."

Last of all he beckoned Tillie to come to his side and eat what remained.

"Men eat meat," he continued, looking over the heads of the two hunters. "Old people and children are content with frozen fish. When I was here before there were men in this camp. There was meat in the tepees. The dogs had meat. Now I see the men are all gone."

One of the hunters raised his arms above his head, a gesture indicating strength, and let them fall resignedly to his side, a sign of despair.

"The caribou are gone, Snow Burner," he said dully. "That is why there is no meat. All gone. The god of good kills has turned his face from us. Little Bear—" to the old man—"how long have our people hunted the caribou here?"

Little Bear lifted his head, his wizened, smoked face more a black, carved mask than a human countenance.

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"Big Bear, my father, was an old man when I was born," he said slowly. "When he was a boy so small that he slept with the women, our people came here for the Winter hunt."

"Oh, Little Bear," chanted the hunter, "great was your father, the hunter; great were you as a hunter in your young days. Was there ever a Winter before when the caribou were not found here in plenty?"

The old man shook his head.

"Oh, Snow Burner," said the hunter, "these are the words of Little Bear, whose age no one knows. Always the caribou have been plenty here along this river in the Winter. Longer than any old man's tales reach back have they fed upon the willows. They are not here this Winter. The gods are angry with us. We hunt. We hunt till we lie flat on the snow. We find no signs. There are men still here, Snow Burner, but the caribou have gone."

"Have gone, have gone, have gone. Ah wo!" chanted the old squaw.

"Where do you hunt?" asked Reivers tersely.

"Where we have always hunted; where our fathers hunted before us," was the reply. "Along the river in the muskeg and bush to the south we hunt. The caribou are not there. They are nowhere. The gods have taken them away. We must die and go where they are."

"We must go," wailed the old squaw. "The gods refuse us meat. We must go."

Her chant of despair was heard beyond the tepee. In the smaller tents other voices took up the wail. The women were singing the death song, their primitive protest and acquiescence to what they considered the irrevocable pleasure of their dark gods.

Reivers waited until the last squaw had whined herself into silence. Even then he did not speak at once. He knew that these simple people, who for his deeds had given him the expressive name of Snow Burner, were waiting for him to speak, and he knew the value of silence upon their primitive souls. He sat with folded arms, looking above the heads of the two hunters.

"You have done well," he said, nodding impressively, but not looking at the two young men. "You have hunted as men who have the true hunter's heart. But what can man do when the gods are against him? The gods are against you. They are not against me. Tomorrow I slay you your fill of caribou."

"Snow Burner," whispered one of the hunters in the awe-stricken silence that followed this announcement, "there are no caribou here. Are you greater than the gods?"

Reivers looked at him, and at the light in his eyes the young man drew back in fright.

"Tomorrow I give you your fill of meat," he said slowly. "Not only enough for one day, but enough for all Winter. Each tepee shall be piled high with meat. Even the dogs shall eat till they want no more. I have promised. I alone. Do you—" he pointed at the hunters—"bring me tonight the two best rifles in the camp. If they do not shoot true tomorrow, do not let me find you here when I return from the hunt. And now the rest of you—all of you—go from here. Go, I will be alone."

They rose and went out obediently, except Tillie who watched Reivers's face with avid eyes as the young girl left the tepee. Then she crawled forward and touched her forehead to his hand, for Reivers had not bestowed upon the girl a glance.

Presently the hunters came back and placed their Winchesters at his feet. He examined each weapon carefully, found them in perfect order and fully loaded, and dismissed the men with a wave of his arm. Tillie sat with bowed head, humbly waiting his pleasure, but Reivers rolled himself in his blanket and lay down alone by the fire.

"I wish to sleep warm," he said. "See that the fire does not go out till the night is half gone. Be ready to go with me in the hour before daylight. Have the swiftest and strongest team of dogs and the largest sledge hitched and waiting to bear us to the hunt. Go! Now I sleep."

CHAPTER VII

THE SNOW BURNER HUNTS

THE snarling of dogs being put into harness awoke him in the morning, but he lay pretending to sleep until Tillie, having overseen the hitching-up, came in, prepared food over the fire, which had not gone out all night, and came timidly and laid a hand on his shoulder.

It was pitch dark when they went from the tepee. The dogs whined at the prospect of a dark trail, and the hunter who

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held them plied his whip savagely. With the rifles carefully stowed in their buckskin cases on the sledge, and a big camp-ax, as their whole burden, Reivers immediately took command of the dogs and headed down the river.

"Oh, Snow Burner!" chattered the frozen hunter in disappointment. "There are no caribou to the south. It is a waste of strength to hunt there."

"There are no caribou anywhere for you," retorted Reivers. "For me it does not make any difference where I hunt; the spirits are with me. Stay close to the tepees today. If any one follows my trail the spirits will refuse their help. Hi-yah! Moosh!"

Under the sting of his skilfully wielded whip the big team whirled down the river, Reivers riding in front, Tillie behind. But they did not go south for long. A few miles below the camp Reivers abruptly swung the dogs off the river-bed and bore westward.

Half a mile of this and he shifted and changed his course to right angles, straight toward the north.

"And now, mush! —— you! Mush for all that's in you!" he cried, plying the whip. "You've got many miles to cover before daylight. Moosh, moosh!"

He held straight northward until he left the bush and reached the open tundra at the spot where the caribou the day before had swung away farther north. He knew that the herd, being in country undisturbed by man, would not travel far from the willows where he had jumped them the day before, and he held cautiously on their trail until the first gray of daylight showed a rise in the land ahead. Here he halted the dogs and crept forward on foot.

It was as he expected. The caribou had halted on the other side of the height of land, feeling secure in that region where no man ever came. Below him he could see them moving, and he realized that he must act at once, before they began their travels of the day.

"Tillie," he whispered, coming back to the sledge, "as soon as you can see the snow on the knoll ahead do you drive the dogs around there, to the right, and swing to the left along the other side of the knoll. Drive fast and shout loud. Shout as if the wolves had you. There are caribou over the knoll. When the dogs see them let them go straight for the herd. But wait till the snow shows white in the daylight."

Snatching both rifles from their covers, he ran around the left shoulder of the knoll and ambushed in a trifling hollow. He waited patiently, one rifle cocked and in his hand, the other lying ready at his side. The light grew broader; the herd, just out of safe rifle shot, began milling restlessly.

Suddenly, from around the right of the knoll, came the sharp yelp of a dog as Tillie's leader, rounding the ridge, caught scent and sight of living meat ahead. The caribou stopped dead. Then bedlam broke loose as the dogs saw what was before them. And the caribou, trembling at the wolf-yells of the dogs, broke into their swift, lumbering run and came streaking straight past Reivers at fifty yards distance.

Reivers waited until the maddened beasts were running four deep before him. Then the slaughter began. No need to watch the sights here. The crash of shot upon shot followed as quickly as he could pump the lever. There were ten shots in each rifle, and he fired them all before the herd was out of range. Then only the hideous yelps of the maddened dogs tore the morning quiet. A dozen caribou, some dead, some kicking, some trying to crawl away, were scattered over the snow, and Reivers nodded and knew that his hold on Tillie's people was complete.

The dogs were on the first caribou now, snarling, yelping, fighting, eating, for the time being as wild and savage as any of their wolf forebears. Tillie, spilled from the sledge in the first mad rush of the team, came waddling up to Reivers and bowed down before him humbly.

"Snow Burner, I know you are only a man, because I alone of my people have seen you among other white men," she said. "Yet you are more than other men. Snow Burner, I have lived among white people and know that the talk of spirits is only for children. But how knew you that the caribou were here?"

"The meat is there," said Reivers, pointing at his kill. "Your work is to take care of it. The ax is on the sledge. Cut off as many saddles and hind-quarters as the dogs can drag back to camp. The rest we will cache here. To your work. Do not ask questions."

He reloaded and put the wounded animals out of their misery, each with a shot

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through the head, and sat down and watched her as she slaved at her butcher's task. Tillie had lived among white people, had been to the white man's school even, but Reivers knew he would slacken his hold on her if he demeaned himself by assisting her in her toil.

When the dogs had stayed their hunger he leaped into their midst with clubbed rifle and knocked them yelping away from their prey. When they turned and attacked him he coolly struck and kicked till they had enough. Then with the driving whip he beat them till they lay flat in the snow and whined for mercy.

By the time Tillie had the sledge loaded and the rest of the kill cached under a huge heap of snow, it was noon, and the dogs started back with their heavy load, open-mouthed and panting, their excitement divided between fear of the man who had mastered them and the odor of fresh blood that reeked in their avid nostrils.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WHITE MAN'S WILL

THAT night in the camp at the river bend the Indians feasted ravenously, and Reivers, sitting in Tillie's place as new-made chief, looked on without smiling.

"Oh, Snow Burner!" said the oldest man at last. "What is it you want with us? Our furs? Speak. We obey your will."

"Furs are good," replied Reivers, "when a man has nothing else, but gold is better, and the gold that another man has is best of all."

The old man cackled respectfully.

"Oh, Snow Burner! Do you come to us for gold? Do you think we would sit here without meat if we had gold? No, Snow Burner. What we have you can have. Your will with the tribe from the oldest to the youngest is our law. We owe you our lives. The strength of our young men is yours; the wisdom of our old heads is yours. But gold we have not. Do not turn your frown upon us, Snow Burner; you must know it is the truth."

"Since when," said Reivers sternly, "has my friend, old Little Bear, dared say that the Snow Burner has the foolishness of a woman in his head? Do you think I come seeking gold from you? No. It is the strength of your young men and the wisdom of your old heads that I want. I seek gold. You shall help me find it."

Little Bear raised his arms and let them fall in the eloquent Indian gesture of helplessness.

"White men have been here often to seek for gold. The great Snow Burner once was one of them. They have digged holes in the ground. They have taken the sand from creek bottoms. Did the Snow Burner, who finds caribou where there are none, find any gold here? No. It is an old story. There is no gold here."

Reivers leaned forward and spoke harshly.

"Listen, Little Bear; listen all you people. There is gold within three days' march from here. Much gold. Another man digs it. You will find it for me. I have spoken."

Silence fell on the tepee. The Indians looked at one another. Little Bear finally spoke with bowed head.

"We do the Snow Burner's will."

Nawa, the youngest and strongest of the hunters, turned to Reivers respectfully.

"Oh, Snow Burner, Nawa serves you with the strength of his leg and the keenness of his eyes. Nawa knows that the Snow Burner sees things that are hidden to us. Our oldest men say there is no gold here. Other white men say there is no gold here. The Snow Burner says there is gold near here.

"The Snow Burner sees what is hidden to others. Nawa does not doubt. Nawa waits only the Snow Burner's commands. But Nawa has been to the settlements at Fifty Mile and Dumont's Camp. He has heard the white men talk. They talk there of a man who carries gold like gunpowder and gold like bullets instead of the white man's money.

"Nawa has talked with Indians who have seen this man. They call him 'Iron Hair,' because his hair is black and stiff like the quills of a porcupine. Oh, Snow Burner, Nawa knows nothing. He merely tells what he has heard. Is this the man the Snow Burner, too, has heard of!"

Reivers looked around the circle of smoke-blackened faces about the fire. No expression betrayed what was going on behind those wood-like masks, but Reivers knew Indians and sensed that they were all waiting excitedly for his answer.

"That is the man," he said, and by the

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complete silence that followed he knew that his reply had caused a sensation that would have made white men swear. "What know you of Iron Hair, Nawa?"

"Oh, Snow Burner," said Nawa dolefully, "our tribe knows of Iron Hair to its sorrow. Two moons ago the big man with the hair like a porcupine was at Fifty Mile for whisky and food. He hired Small Eyes and Broken Wing of our tribe to haul the food to his camp, a day's traveling each way, so he said. The pay was to be big. Small Eyes and Broken Wing went. So much people know. Nothing more. The sledges did not come back. Small Eyes and Broken Wing did not come back. So much do we know of Iron Hair. Nawa has spoken."

"Once there were men in these tepees," said Reivers, looking high above Nawa's head. "Once there were men who would have gone from their tepees to follow to the end the trail of their brothers who go and do not come back. Now there are no men. They sit in the tepees with the women and keep warm. Perhaps Small Eyes and Broken Wing were men and did not care to come back to people who sit by their fires and do not seek to find their brothers who disappear."

"We have sought, oh, Snow Burner," said Nawa hopelessly. "Do not think we have only sat by our fires. We sought to follow the trail of Iron Hair out of Fifty Mile——"

"How ran the trail?" interrupted Reivers.

"Between the north and the west. We went to hunt our brothers. But a storm had blotted out the trail. Iron Hair had gone out in the storm. Who can follow when there is no trail to see?"

"Once," resumed Reivers in the tone of contempt, "there were strong dog-drivers and sharp eyes here. They would have found the camp of Iron Hair in those days."

"Our dogs still are strong, our young men drive well, our eyes are sharp even now, Snow Burner," came Nawa's weary reply. "We searched. Even as we searched for the caribou we searched for the camp of Iron Hair. We found no camp. There is no white man's camp in this country. There is no camp at all. We searched till nothing the size of a man's cap could be hidden. The white men from Dumont's Camp and Fifty Mile have searched for the gold which white men are mad for. They found nothing. At the settlements the white men say, 'This man must be the devil himself and go to hell for his gold, because his camp certainly is not in this world where men can see it with their eyes.' "

"And the caribou were not in this world, either?" mocked Reivers.

Nawa shook his head.

"White men, too, have looked for the camp of Iron Hair."

"Many white men," supplemented old Little Bear. "White men always look when they hear of gold. They find gold if it is to be found. The earth gives up its secrets to them. Snow Burner, they could not find the place where Iron Hair digs his gold."

"Nawa and his hunters could not find the caribou," said Reivers.

There was no reply. He had driven his will home.

"Oh, Snow Burner," said Nawa, at last, "as Little Bear has said, we do your will."

"Good," Reivers rose and towered over them. "My will at present is that you go to your tepees. Sleep soundly. I have work for you in the morning."

He stood and watched while they filed, stooped over, through the low opening in the tepee wall. They went without question, without will of their own. A stronger will than theirs had caught them and held them. From hence on they were wholly subservient to the superior mentality which was to direct their actions. Reivers smiled. Old MacGregor had felt safe in telling about the mine; a strange man had no chance to find it. But MacGregor did not know of Tillie's people.

Reivers suddenly turned toward the fire. Tillie was standing there, arrayed in buckskin so white that she must have kept it protected from the tepee smoke in hope of his coming. At the sight of her there came before Reivers' eyes the picture of Hattie MacGregor's face as she had looked up at him when he was leaving the MacGregor cabin. The look that came over his face then was new even to Tillie.

"You, too, get out!" he roared, and Tillie fled from the tepee in terror.

CHAPTER IX

ANY MEANS TO AN END

IN THE big tepee Reivers rolled on his blankets and cursed himself for his weakness. What had happened to him? Was he getting to be like other men, that

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he would let the memory of an impudent, red-haired girl interfere with his plans or pleasures? Had he not sworn to forget? And yet here came the memory of her—the wide gray eyes, the suffering mouth, the purity of the look of her—rising before his eyes like a vision to shame him.

To shame him! To shame the Snow Burner! He understood the significance of the look she had given him, and which had stood between him and Tillie. Womanhood, pure, noble womanhood, was appealing to his better self.

His better self! Reivers laughed a laugh so ghastly that it might have come from a bare skull. His better self! If a man believed in things like that he had to believe in the human race—had to believe in goodness and badness, virtue and sin, right and wrong, and all that silly, effeminate rot. Reivers didn't believe in that stuff. He knew only one life-law, that of strength over weakness, and that was the law he would live and die with, and Miss Hattie MacGregor could not interfere.

With his terrible will-power he erased the memory of her from his mind. He did not erase the resentment at his own weakness. On the contrary, this resentment grew. He would revenge himself for that moment of weakness.

There were two ways of finding Moir and the mysterious mine. One—the way he had first planned to follow—was to scatter his Indians, and as many others as he could bribe with caribou meat, over the country lying to the south of Fifty Mile, where he knew the mine must be. Moir, or his men, must show themselves sooner or later. In time the Indians would find Moir's camp.

But there was also a shorter and surer way—a shameful way. Moir, by the talk he had heard of him, came to Fifty Mile and Dumont's Camp for such whisky and feminine company as might be found. He had even sent one of his henchmen to steal Hattie MacGregor. Such a move proved that Moir was desperate, and by this time, by the non-appearance of the would-be kidnaper, the chief would know that his man was either killed or captured, and that no hope for a woman lay in that quarter. Moir's next move would be to come to Fifty Mile and Dumont's, or to send a man there, to procure the means of salving his disappointment. And Reivers had two attractive women at his disposal, Tillie, and the young girl who was nearly beautiful. Thus did Reivers overcome his momentary weakness. The black shamefulness of his scheme he laughed at. Then he went to sleep.

He gave his orders to Tillie early next morning.

"Have this tepee and another one loaded on one sledge," he directed. "Have a second sledge loaded with caribou meat. Do you and the young girl prepare to come with me. We are going on a long journey. You will both take your brightest clothes."

He waited with set jaws while his orders were obeyed. No weakness any more. There was only one law, the strong over the weak, and he was the strong one.

A call from Tillie apprised him that all was ready, and he strode forth to find Nawa, the young hunter, waiting with the two women ready for the trail.

"How so?" he demanded. "Did I say aught about Nawa?"

"Oh, Snow Burner," whispered Tillie, "Neopa is to be Nawa's squaw with the coming of Spring. They wish to go together."

"And I do not wish them to go together," said Reivers harshly. "Give me that rifle." He took the weapon from Nawa's hands. "Do you stay here and eat caribou meat and grow fat against the coming of Spring, Nawa."

"Snow Burner," said Nawa, a flash of will lighting his eyes for the moment, "does Neopa come back to me?"

"Perhaps," said Reivers, cocking the rifle. "But if you try to follow you will never come back. Is it understood?"

Nawa bowed his head and turned away. Neopa made as if to run to him, but Reivers caught her brutally and threw her upon the lead sledge. He had resolved to travel the way of shame, no matter what the cost to others.

"Mush! Get on!" he roared at the dogs, and with the rifle ready and with a backward glance at Nawa, he drove away for Fifty Mile and Dumont's Camp.

CHAPTER X

THE SQUAW-MAN

A DAY after Reivers drove out of the Indian camp, Dumont's Camp had something to talk about. A half-witted, crippled-up squaw-man went through with

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a couple of squaws, and the youngest of the squaws was a beaut'! The old bum hadn't stopped long, just long enough to trade a chunk of caribou meat for a bottle of hooch, but long enough, nevertheless, to let the gang get a peek at the squaws.

Dumont's Camp opined that it was a good thing for the old cripple that he hadn't stayed longer, else he might have found himself minus his squaws, especially the young one. But Dumont's Camp would have been mightily puzzled had it seen how the limp and stoop went out of the squaw-man's body the moment he had left their camp behind, how the foolish leer and stuttering speech disappeared from his mouth, and how, straight-backed and stern-visaged, he threw the bottle of hooch away in contempt and hurried on toward Fifty Mile.

Reivers had played many strange parts in his tumultuous life, and his squaw-man was a masterpiece. Fifty Mile had its sensation early next morning. The half-witted, crippled-up squaw-man with the two extremely desirable squaws came through, stopped for another bottle of hooch, and drove on and made camp just outside the settlement.

"He certainly was one soft-headed old bum," said Jack Raftery, leaning on the packing-case that served as bar in his log-cabin saloon. "Yes, men, he certainly is bumped in the bean and locoed in his arms. Gimme that chunk o' meat there for a bottle o' hooch. 'Bout fifty pounds, it'll weigh. I'd give 'im a gallon, but he grins foolish and says: 'Bottle. One bottle.' 'Drag your meat in,' says I. Well, gents, will you b'lieve he couldn't make it. No, sir; paralyzed in the arms or something.

"That young squaw o' his did the toting. A beaut'? Gents, there never was anything put up in a brown hide to touch it. An' that locoed ol' bum running 'round loose with it. Tempting providence, that's what he is, when he comes parading 'round real men - folks with skirts like them. Shouldn't wonder if something'd happen to him one o' these cold days. Looks like he might 'a' been an awful good man in his day, too. Well built. Reckon he's been used mighty rough to be locoed and crippled up the way he is."

"I reck-ong," drawled Black Pete, who ran the games at Raftery's when there was any money in sight. "I reck-ong too mebbe he get handle more rough some tam ef he's hang 'round long wid dem two squaw. Tha' small squaw's too chic, she, to b'long to ol' bum lak heem."

The assembled gents laughed. Had they seen the "ol' bum" at that moment their laughter would have been cut short. Reivers, in a gully out of sight of the settlement, had thrown away his hooch, pitched camp, tethered the dogs and made all secure with a swiftness and efficiency that belied the characterization Black Pete had applied to him. He had the two tepees set up far apart, the dogs tied between them, and Tillie and Neopa had one tepee, and Reivers the other, alone.

Having made camp, Reivers knew what the boys would expect of him in his character of sodden squaw-man. Having resolved to use the most shameful means in the world to achieve his end, he played his base part to perfection.

"Do you take this chunk of meat," he directed Tillie, "and go down to the saloon and get another bottle of hooch. Yes, yes; I know I have destroyed one bottle. You are not to ask questions but to obey my commands. Go down and trade the meat for hooch. Do not stop to speak to the white men. Come back at once. Go!"

But down in Raftery's the assemblage had no hint of these swift changes, and they laughed merrily at Black Pete's remarks.

"What d'you reckon his lay is, Jack?" asked one.

"Booze," replied Raftery instantly. "Nothing else. When you see a man who's sure been as good a man in his day as this relic, trailing 'round with squaw folks, you can jest nacherlly whittle a little marker for him and paint on it, "'Nother white man as the hooch hez got.' Sabbe? I trace him out as some prospector who's got crippled up and been laying out 'mongst the Indians with a good supply of the ol' frost-bite cure 'longside of 'im. Nothin' to do but tuh hit the jug offen enough to keep from gettin' sober and remembering what he used to was. Sabbe? Been layin' out sucking the neck of a jug till his ol' thinker's got twisted.

"I've seen dozens of 'em. You can't fool me when I see one, and I saw him when he was comin' through the door. Ran out o' hooch and was afraid he'd get sober, so he comes down here to get soaked up some more. Brings his load o' meat 'long to trade in, an' these two brown dolls to make sure in case the caribou have been down this

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way, which they ain't. Bet the drinks against two bits that he'll be chasin' one o' the squaws down here for another bottle before an hour's gone. They all do. I've seen his kind before."

Black Pete took the bet.

"Because I'm onlucky, *moi*, lately, an' I want to lose this bet," he explained.

Raftery laughed homerically.

"What's on you' chest, Jack?" demanded one of his friends.

"I was just thinking," gurgled the saloonist, "what 'ud happen in case this stiff gent, Iron Hair, was to run in 'bout this time."

"By Gar!" laughed Pete. "An' Iron Hair, he's just 'bout due."

At that moment Tillie came waddling in, laid down her bundle of meat before Raftery and said—

"One bottle."

"What'd I tell you?" chuckled Raftery, handing over the liquor. "Boss him get laid out, eh?" he said to Tillie.

But Tillie did not pause for conversation. She whipped the bottle under her blanket and waddled out without a word.

"Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" proclaimed Raftery. "That ol' bum has got 'em well trained, anyhow."

Black Pete pulled his beard reflectively.

"Come to theenk," he mused aloud, "dere was wan rifle on those sledge. I theenk mebbe I no go viseet thees ol' bum, he's camp, teel she's leetle better acquaint' weeth *moi*."

CHAPTER XI

THE SCORN OF A PURE WOMAN

AND Fifty Mile talked. It talked to all who came in from the white wastes of the country around. It talked in its tents. It talked while trifling with Black Pete's games of no-chance. It talked around Raftery's bar. It talked so loudly that men heard it up at Dumont's Camp.

From Fifty Mile and Dumont's the talk spread up and down the trails, and even out to solitary cabins and dugouts where there were no trails. Wherever men were to be found in that desolate region the talk of Fifty Mile soon made its way. And the talk was mainly of the young squaw, of the old crippled-up squaw-man, and that she was of a beauty to set men's heads a-whirling and make them murder each other for her possession.

Men meeting each other on the trails asked three questions in order:

"Where you trav'ling? How's your tobacco? Heard about the beaut' of a little squaw down to Fifty Mile?"

Men traveling in the direction of the settlements bent their steps toward Fifty Mile, even though it lay far out of their course. Men traveling in the opposite direction passed the news to all whom they bespoke. Of those who came to the settlement, many strolled casually up the gully where the squaw-man had his camp. And all of them strolled down again with nothing to brag about but a drink of hooch and a mouthful of talk with the squaw-man.

"I don't quite follow that gent's curves," summed up Jack Raftery, speaking for the gang. "He gets enough hooch here to keep any human gent laid out twenty-six hours out of the twenty-four, but somehow whenever you come moseying up to his camp he's on his pins, ready to give you a drink and a lot of locoed talk. Yessir, he sure is locoed until he needs a guardian, but for one I don't go to do no rushing of his lady-folks, not while he's able to stand on his pins and keep his eyes moving. Gents, there's been one awful stiff man in his day, and his condition goes to show what booze'll do to the best of 'em, and ought to be a warning to us all. Line up, men; 'bout third drink time for me."

"There is sometheeng about heem," agreed Black Pete, "I don' know what 'tees, but there is sometheeng that whispairs to me, 'Look out!' "

While Fifty Mile thus debated his character, Reivers lay in his tepee, carefully playing the shameful part he had assumed. He knew that by now the news of his arrival, or rather the arrival of Neopa and Tillie, had been bruited far and wide around the settlements. Soon the news must come to the ears of the man for whose benefit the scheme had been arranged.

Shanty Moir, being what he was, would become interested when he heard the descriptions of Neopa, and, also because he was what he was, he would waste no time, falter at no risks, stop at nothing when his interest had been aroused. Reivers had only to wait. Moir would come. The only danger was that Hattie and her uncle might come before him.

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ON THE third day after the squaw-man's arrival, Fifty Mile had a second sensation. That morning, as Reivers, staggering artistically, came out of Raftery's house of poison, he all but stumbled over a sledge before the door. With his assumed grin of idiocy growing wider, he examined the sledge carefully, next the team which was hitched to it, then lifted his eyes to the man and woman that stood beside the outfit. At the first glance he had recognized the sledge, and he needed the time thus gained to recover from the shock.

"Hello, Mac, ol' timer!" he bellowed drunkenly at Duncan MacGregor. "Come have a drink with me."

MacGregor looked at him dourly, disgust and anger on his big red face. Hattie, at his side, looked away, her lips pressed tightly together to control the anger rising within her. She had gone deadly pale at the first sight of Reivers; now the red of shame was burning in her cheeks.

"I shook hands with you, stranger, when you left our roof," said MacGregor gruffly. "I do not do so now. I thought you were a man."

"I never did!" snapped Hattie, still looking away. "I knew it was not a man." Something like a sob seemed to wrench itself from her chest in spite of her firm lips. "I knew it was—just what it is."

Suddenly she flared around on Reivers, her face wan with mingled pain, shame and anger.

"Now you are doing just what you are fit for. I've heard. Living on your squaws! And you dared to talk big to me—to a decent woman. Blood of my father! You dared to talk to me at all! Drive on, Uncle. We'll go on to Dumont's. We'll get away from this thing; it pollutes the air. Hi-yah, Bones! Mush, mush, mush!"

Reivers leered and grinned foolishly—for the benefit of the onlookers—as the sledge went on out of sight.

"See?" he said boastfully. "I used to know white folks once. Yes sir; used to know lot of 'em. Don't now. Only know Indians. S'long, boys; got to go home."

All that day he sat alone in his tepee. Tillie came to him at noon with food and he cursed her and drove her away. In the evening she came to him again, and again Reivers ordered her not to lift the flap on his tepee.

Tillie by this time was fully convinced that The Snow Burner had gone mad. Else why had he repulsed all her advances? Why had he refused to look at the young and attractive Neopa? And now he even spurned food. Yes, the Snow Burner had gone mad, as white men sometimes go mad in the North; but she was still his slave. That was her fate.

Reivers sat alone in his tepee, once more fighting to put away the face of Hattie MacGregor as it rode before his eyes, a burning, searing memory. He was not faltering. The shame for him, because he was a white man, because she had once had him under her roof, that Hattie MacGregor had suffered as she saw him now, did not swerve him in the least from the way he was going.

He had decided to do it this way. That was settled. The shame and degradation of his assumed position he had reckoned and counted as naught in the game he was playing. Any means to an end. These same men who were despising him for a sodden squaw-man would bow their heads to him when the game was won. And he would win it, and the memory of the face of Hattie MacGregor would not halt him in the least. Rather it would spur him on. For when the game was won, he would laugh at her—and forget.

For the present it was a little hard to forget. That was why he sat alone in the tepee and swore at Tillie when she timidly offered to bring him food.

So the red-headed girl thought that of him, did she—that he was living on his squaws? Well, let her think it. What difference did it make? She thought he was that base, did she? All right. She would pay for it all when the time came.

Reivers roused himself and strode outdoors. His thoughts persisted in including Hattie MacGregor in their ramblings as he sat in the tepee, and he felt oppressed. What he needed was to mingle with other men. He'd forget, then. He condemned the company that was to be found at Raftery's, but his need for distraction drove him and, assuming the stoop, limp and leer of the sodden squaw-man, he slumped off down the gully to the settlement.

It was a clear, starlit night, and as he slumped along he mused on what a fine night it would be for picking out a trail by

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the stars. As he approached Raftery's he saw and heard evidences of unusual activity in the bar. A team of eight dogs, hitched to an empty sledge, was tied before the door. Within there was sound of riot and wassail. Over the sound of laughter and shuffling feet rose a voice which drowned the other noises as the roar of a lion drowns the chirping of birds, a voice that rattled the windows in a terrifying rendition of "Jack Hall."

Oh, I killed a man 'tis said, so 'tis said;
I killed a man 'tis said, so 'tis said.
I kicked 'is bloody head, an' I left 'im lyin' dead;
Yes, I left 'im lyin' dead —— 'is eyes!

Reivers opened the door and strode in silently and unobserved. He made a base, contemptible figure as, stooped and shuffling, a foolish leer on his face, he stood listening apologetically to the song. The broad back of the singer was turned toward him. As the song ended Raftery's roaming eye caught sight of Reivers.

"Ah, there he is; here he is, Iron Hair. There's the man with the squaws I was telling you about."

The man swung around, and Reivers was face to face with the man he sought, Shanty Moir.

CHAPTER XII

SHANTY MOIR

REIVERS' tumultuous scheme of life often had led him into situations where his life had hung on his ability to play artistically the part he had assumed. But never had his self-control been put to such a test as now, when he faced Shanty Moir.

Had he not prepared himself for a shock, his surprise must surely have betrayed him, for even the Snow Burner could not look upon Shanty Moir without amazement. To Reivers, the first impression that came was that he was looking at something as raw and primitive as the sources of life itself.

Shanty Moir had little or nothing in common with the other men in the room. He was even shaped differently. He belonged, so it seemed to Reivers, to the age of the saber-tooth tiger, the long-haired mammoth, and a diet of roots and raw flesh.

There was about him the suggestion of man just risen to the dignity of an upright position. His body was enormous—longer, wider, denser than a man's body should be; the legs beneath it short and bowed. There was no neck that could be seen. His arms seemed to begin close up to the ears, and ran downward in curves, like giant calipers, the hands even with the knees.

The head fitted the body, squat and enormous, the forehead running abruptly back from the brows, and the face so flat and bony that the features seemed merely to dent it. The brow-bones came down and half hid the small eyes; the nose was small, but a pair of great nostrils ran back in the skull; the mouth was huge, yet it seemed small, and there was more of the head below it than above.

Iron Hair was well nicknamed. His hair was probably three inches long, and it stood out straight from his head—black, wiry, menacing. Reivers, with his foolish grin growing larger on his face, appraised Moir with considerable admiration. Here was the real thing, the pure, unadulterated man-animal, unweakened, untouched by effeminizing civilization. This man knew no more law or conscience than the ancient cave-tiger, whose only dictates sprang from appetite.

Reivers had rejected morals because it pleased him to run contrary to all the rest of the world; this man never knew that right or wrong existed. What his appetites told him to take he took as a matter of course. And it was written in his face that his appetites were as abnormally powerful as was he.

Reivers had been a leader of men because his mind was stronger than the minds of the men with whom he had dealt. This man was a leader because of the blind, unintelligent force that was in him. And inwardly the fighting man in Reivers glowed at the prospects of the Titanic clash that would come between them.

Shanty Moir as he looked from under his bony brows saw exactly what Reivers wished him to see: a drunken, broken squaw-man, so weak that he could not possibly be the slightest source of trouble. Being primitive of mind he listed Reivers at once as helpless. Having done this, nothing could alter his opinion; and Reivers had gained the vantage that he sought.

Moir threw back his head and laughed, softly and behind set teeth, when his quick inspection of Reivers was ended.

"So that's tuh waster who's got tuh squaws 'at hass tuh camp upset," he said

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languidly. "Eh, sonnies! Art no men among ye that ye have not gone woman-stealing by this? Tuh waster does not look hard to take a young woman from."

Reivers broke into an apologetic snigger.

"Don't you try to steal my two kids, mister," he whined. "You'd be mighty sorry for your bargain if you did."

"How so, old son?" demanded Moir with a tolerant laugh.

"Them kids—if you was to steal them without my permission—one or both of 'em—they'd make you wish you'd never seen 'em—'less I was along," chuckled Reivers.

"Speak it up, old son," said Moir sharply. "What's behind thy fool's words?"

"Them kids—they'd die if they was took away from me," replied Reivers seriously. "And they'd take the man who stole 'em to the happy hunting ground along with 'em." He winked prodigiously. "Lots of funny things in this ol' world, mister. You wouldn't think to look at me that those two kids wouldn't want to live if I wasn't with 'em, but that's the fact. I wasn't always what I'm now, mister. Once—well, I was different once—and them kids will just nacherlly manage to poison the first man who touches 'em—unless I give the word."

The men of Fifty Mile looked at one another, and Black Pete shuddered.

"The ol' moocher sure has got 'em trained, Iron Hair," said Raftery. "He's locoed, but those squaws look up to him like a little tin god, and that's no lie."

"Poison?" repeated Moir doubtingly. "Art a medicine man, old son?"

Reivers shook his head loosely.

"Not me, mister, not me," he chuckled. "It's something Indian that I don't sabbe. But there's a couple graves 'way up where we came from, and they hold what's left of a couple of bad men who raided my camp and stole my kids. I don't know how it happened, mister. The kids came back to me the same night, and the two bad men were stiff and black—as black as your hair, mister, after the first kiss."

"The kiss of Death," chimed in Black Pete, crossing himself. "I have heard of eet. *Sacrê!* I am the lucky dog, *moi.*"

Shanty Moir nodded. He, too, had heard of the method by which Indian women of the North on rare occasions revenge themselves upon the brutal white men who steal them from their people. Having often indulged in that thrilling sport himself, Moir was well versed in the obstacles and dangers to be met in its pursuit. Being crafty, with the craft of the lynx that eschews the poisoned deer carcass, he had thus far managed to select his victims from the breed of squaws that do not seriously object to playing a Sabine part; and he had no intention of decreasing his caution now, although what men had spoken of Neopa had fired his blood.

"Ho, ho! I see how 'tis, old son," he said with a grin of appreciation. "Dost manage well for a waster."

He suddenly drew his hand from his mackinaw pocket and held it out, opened, toward Reivers. Two jagged nuggets of dull gold the size of big buckshot jiggled on his palm, and Moir laughed uproariously as Reivers, at the sight of them, bent forward, rubbing his hands together, apparently frantic with avarice.

"Eh—hey!" drawled Moir, closing his fist as Reivers' fingers reached for the gold. "I thought so. 'Tis tuh gold thy wants, eh, old sonny? Well, do thee bring me tuh cattle to look at and we'll try to bargain."

"Come up to my camp," chattered Reivers, eying the fist that contained the nuggets. He was anxious to get out of the bar. He had no fear that the primitive Moir would be able to see any flaw in his acting, but Black Pete and Jack Raftery were less primitive, and he knew that they had not quite accepted him for the weakling that he pretended to be. "Come and visit me. Buy a bottle of hooch and we go up to my camp."

Moir tossed one of the nuggets across the bar to Raftery.

"Is't good for a round, lad?" he laughed.

Raftery cunningly hefted the nugget and set out the bottles.

"Good for two," he replied.

Moir tossed over the second nugget.

"Then that's good for four," said he. "Do ye boys drink it up while I'm away to tuh camp of old sonny here. A bottle, Raftery. Now, sonny, do thee lead on, and if I'm not satisfied I'll wring thy neck to let thee know my displeasure."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BARGAIN

REIVERS led the way to his tepee and bade Moir wait a moment by the fire, while he spoke to Tillie.

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"Dress yourself and Neopa in your newest," he commanded. "Then do you both come in to me, bringing food for two men."

"What's wrong, sonny?" laughed Moir, seeing Reivers come under the door flap alone. "Hast lost the whip over thy cattle?"

"They're getting some grub ready," replied Reivers fawningly. "They'll be here in a minute. Let's have a drink out of that bottle, mister. That's the stuff."

He tipped the bottle to his lips and lowered the burning liquor in a fashion that made even Moir open his eyes in admiration.

"Takest a man-sized nip for a broken waster, sonny," he chuckled, and measuring with his fingers on the bottle a drink larger than Reivers' he tossed it gurgling down his hairy throat. Reivers took the bottle from his hand.

"I always take an eye-opener before my real drink," said Reivers, and, measuring off twice the amount that Moir had taken, he drank it off like so much water.

The fiercest liquor made was to Reivers only a mild stimulant. On his abnormal organization it merely had the effect of intensifying his characteristics. When he wished to drink whisky he drank—out of full-sized water tumblers. When he did not wish to drink he put liquor from him with contempt. Now he handed the bottle back to Moir. The latter looked at him and at the bottle, a trifle puzzled but not dismayed. Reivers had apparently unconsciously passed the challenge to him, and it was not in his nature to play second to any man in a drinking bout.

"Shouldst have taken all thee wanted that time, sonny," said Moir, and finished the bottle.

"No more?" muttered Reivers vacantly.

"Gallons!" replied Moir. "Whisky enough to drown you dead—if your women satisfy."

"Look at them," said Reivers as the door-flap was flung back. "Here they are."

Tillie came in first. She was dressed in white buckskin, her hair hanging in two thick braids down her shoulders. Neopa followed, and the wistfulness that had come into her face from thinking of Nawa made her the more interesting in Shanty Moir's eyes.

A glance from Neopa's fawn-like eyes at the big man whom Reivers had brought home with him, and then her eyes sought the ground and she trembled. Tillie looked at Moir with interest. Save for the Snow Burner, she had never seen so masterful a man. She looked at Reivers and saw that he was not watching her. So she smiled upon Moir slyly. She was the Snow Burner's slave; his will was her law. But since he refused to notice her smiles it would do no harm to smile upon a man like this Iron Hair—just a little, when the Snow Burner was not looking.

Moir read the smile wrong and spoke sharply to Reivers.

"Take the young one outside for two minutes. I've a word to say to this one."

To his surprise Reivers rose without demur, thrust Neopa out before him, and dropped the flap.

"Listen," whispered Moir swiftly in her own tongue to Tillie, "we will put this man out of the way. It is easily done. Then you will go with me, you and the young one, and you will be first in my tepee and the young one your slave. Speak quickly. We will be on the trail in an hour."

Still smiling invitingly, Tillie shook her head.

"The Snow Burner is the master," she said seriously. "I will slay the man who does him harm. I can not do what he does not wish. I can not go away from him."

"But when he is dead, fool, he can have no wish."

The smile went from Tillie's full lips and she took a step toward the opening.

"Stop," laughed Moir softly. "I merely wished to know if you are a true woman. All right, old sonny!" he called. "Come on in."

"I takest off cap to you, lad," he continued as Reivers and Neopa reentered. "Hast got thy squaws fair buffaloed." His eyes ran over the shrinking Neopa in cruel appraisal. "Now, old sonny, out with it. What's thy idea of tuh bargain?"

Reivers looked longingly toward the empty whisky bottle.

"Said enough," laughed Moir. "Shall have all tuh hooch thy guts can hold."

Reivers shook his head, a sly grin appearing on his lips.

"Hooch is good," said he, "but gold is better."

"Go on," said Moir sullenly.

"You've got gold," continued Reivers. "I saw it. You've got lots of gold; I've

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heard them talk about you down at Raftery's. You want us to go with you when you go back to your camp, don't you?"

Moir nodded angrily.

"I want the women," he said brutally. "I might be able to use you, too."

Reivers cackled and rubbed his hands.

"You've got to use me if you're going to have the women," he chuckled. "You know that by this time, don't you, mister?"

Again Moir's black head nodded in grudging assent.

"What then?" he demanded.

"I'm a handy man around a camp, mister," whined Reivers. "You got to take me along if you take the women, but I can be a help——"

"Canst cook?" snapped Moir suddenly.

"Heh, heh! Can I cook?" Reivers rubbed his hands. "I'm an old—I used to be an old sour-dough, mister. Did you ever see one of the old-timers who couldn't cook?"

"Might use thee then," said Moir. "My fool of a cook has gone. Sent him after a woman for me, and he hasn't come back. Happen he got himself killed, tuh fool. Wilt kill him myself if he ever shows up without tuh woman. Well, then, if that's settled—what's tuh bargain?"

Reivers appeared to struggle with indecision. In reality the situation was very clear to him. Moir had listed him as a weakling; therefore he had no fear of taking him to the mine. Once there, Moir would be confident of winning the loyalty of the two women from their apparently helpless master. And as it was apparent that the man whom Reivers had slain with a rock had been Moir's cook, it was probable that he was sincere in his offer to use Reivers in that capacity.

"In the Spring," said Reivers in reply to Moir's question, "me and my two kids go north again, back among their own people."

"In the Spring," growled Moir, "canst go to —— for all of me. I'll be traveling then myself. Speak out, sonny. How much?"

"Plenty of hooch for me all Winter," Reivers leered with drunken cunning.

"I said plenty," retorted Moir. "What else?"

"Gold," said Reivers, rubbing his hands. "Gold enough to buy me hooch for all next Summer."

Moir smiled at the miserable request of the man he was dealing with. His eyes ran over the plump Tillie, over Neopa, the supple child-woman.

"Done," he laughed. "And now, old son, break up thy camp while I load my sledge with hooch. Be ready to travel when I come back. I'll bring plenty of liquor, but none to be drinked till we're on the trail. Wilt travel fast and far tonight, I warn thee. But willst have a snug berth in my camp when we get there. Yes," he laughed as he hurried out, "wilt not be able to tear thyself away."

CHAPTER XIV

THE TEST OF THE BOTTLE

UNDER Reivers' sharp orders—given in a way that would have startled Moir had he heard—Tillie and Neopa hurriedly packed the dog-sledges with their belongings, harnessed the dogs and hooked them to the traces.

"Oh, Snow Burner," said Neopa timidly, "do we go back to Nawa?"

"In good time," said Reivers. "For the present, you have only to obey my wishes. Get on the first sledge."

With bowed head the girl took the place directed, and Reivers turned to find Tillie smiling craftily at his elbow.

"Snow Burner," she said softly, "this is the man, Iron Hair, who digs the gold which you want. We go to rob him. I understand. You play at drinking to fool Iron Hair. It is well. Tillie will help the Snow Burner. We will kill Iron Hair and take his gold. Then the Snow Burner will come with Tillie to her tepee?"

Reivers looked at her, and for the first time he felt a revulsion against the base part he was playing. Would he return with Tillie to her tepee when this affair was over? Would he go on with his old way of living, the base part of him triumphant over the better self? The strange questions rapped like trip-hammers on Reivers' conscience.

"Get on the sledge!" he growled, choked with anger.

She did not stir. He struck her cruelly. Tillie smiled. That was like the Snow Burner of old; and she waddled to her appointed place without further question.

Up the gulch from Raftery's came Moir, quietly leading his dogs, the sledge well loaded with cases of liquor.

"Wilt have a kiss first of all," he laughed

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excitedly, and catching Neopa in his arms tossed her in the air, kissed her loudly on her averted cheeks and set her back on the sledge. "Now, old son, follow and follow quietly. When Iron Hair travels he wants no Fifty Mile gang on his trail. Say nothing, but keep me in sight. Heyah, mush, mush!"

Out of the gully he led the way swiftly and silently to the open country beyond the settlement. There he circled in a confusing way, bearing northward. After an hour he began circling again, doubling on his trail to make it hard for any one to follow, but finally Reivers knew by the stars that the course lay to the south. Another series of false twists in the trail, then Moir struck out in determined fashion on a straight course, east and a trifle south from Fifty Mile.

Reivers, silently guiding his dogs in the tracks made by Moir, breathed hard as he read the stars. By the pace that Moir was setting it seemed certain that he now was making for his camp in a direct line. But if so, if this trail were held, it would take them back toward the Dead Lands, straight into the country that was Duncan MacGregor's trapping-ground. Could the mine be in that region? If so, how could it have escaped the notice of the old trapper?

IT WAS well past midnight when Reivers saw the team ahead disappear in a depression in the ground and heard Moir's voice loudly calling a halt. By the time Reivers came up with his two sledges Moir had unhitched his dogs on the flat of a frozen river-bed and was hurriedly dragging a bottle from one of the cases on his sledge.

"Hell's fire, old son; unhook and camp. The liquor's dying in me, and I had just begun to feel good."

"I was wondering," gasped Reivers in assumed exhaustion, "I was wondering how much farther you were going before you opened a bottle."

"Have your squaws get out tuh grub," ordered Moir, jamming down the cork. "And now you 'n' me, wilt see who drinks t'other off his feet."

For reply Reivers promptly gulped down a drink that would have strangled most men.

"Good enough," admitted Moir. "Here's better, though." And he instantly improved on Reivers' record.

The first bottle was soon emptied—a quart of raw, fiery hooch—and a second instantly broached.

The food was forgotten by Moir; the women were forgotten. His primitive mind was obsessed with the idea of pouring more burning poison down his throat than this broken-down waster who dared to drink up to him. Bolt upright he sat, laughing and singing, never taking his eyes off Reivers, while drink after drink disappeared down their throats.

No movement of Reivers escaped Moir's vigilant watch for signs of weakness. As Reivers gave no apparent sign of toppling over he grew enraged.

"Hell's fire! Wilt sit here till daylight if thou wilt," he roared. "Drink on there! 'Tis thy turn."

Tillie and Neopa got food ready from the grub-bag and sat waiting patiently; the dogs ceased moving, bedded down in the snow and went to sleep; and still the contest went on.

Finally Reivers discerned the slight thickening of speech and the glassy stare in his opponent's eyes that he had been waiting for. Then, and not until then, did he begin to betray apparent signs of failing.

"Sh-sh-shtrong liquor, m-m-mishter," he stuttered. "Awful sh-sh-shtrong liquor."

Moir cackled in drunken triumph.

" 'Tish bear's milk, old shon. 'Tish made for men. Drink, —— ye, drink again!"

Reivers drank, drank longer and heavier than he had yet done.

"There; take the mate of that, mister, and you'll know you been drinking," he stammered.

Moir's throat by this time had been burned too raw to taste, and his sight was too dulled to measure quantities. He tipped the bottle up and drained it. The dose would have killed a normal man. To Shanty Moir it brought only an inclination to slumber. His head fell forward on his breast.

With a thick-tongued snarl he sat up straight and looked at Reivers. Reivers hiccoughed, swayed in his seat, and collapsed with a drunken clatter.

Moir smiled. He winked in unobserved triumph. Then the superhuman strength with which he had fought off the effects of the liquor snapped like a broken wire, and he pitched forward on his face into the snow.

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CHAPTER XV

THE SNOW BURNER BEGINS TO WEAKEN

REIVERS stood up, looked down at his fallen rival and yawned.

"Body," he mused, "but for a hard head, there lies you."

He bent cautiously over Moir. The Welshman lay with his face half buried in the crusted snow, his lungs pumping like huge bellows, and the snow flying in gusts from around his nostrils at every expulsion of breath. Reivers laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. There was no movement.

"Hey, mister," he called.

The undisturbed breathing showed that the words had not penetrated to the clouded consciousness. Deliberately Reivers turned the big man over on his back. Moir lay as stiff and dead as a log. With swift, deft hands Reivers searched him to the skin, looking for a trail-map, a mark or a sign of any kind that might indicate the location of Moir's mine. He was not greatly disappointed when he failed to find anything of the sort; he had hardly expected that an experienced pirate like Shanty Moir would travel with his secrets on his person.

Next he considered the dogs. It was barely possible that the dogs knew the way to the mine. If they had traveled the way before, they would know when they were on the home-trail, and if so they would travel thither if given their heads, even though their master lay helplessly bound on the sledge. Then at the mine, a sudden surprise, and probably a second of sharp work with the rifle on Moir's henchmen.

Reivers stepped eagerly over to where Moir's team lay sleeping. He swore softly when he saw them. Reivers had traded his tired team for a fresh outfit at Fifty Mile, and the new dogs were as strange to this trail as Reivers himself.

His triumph over Moir in the drinking bout had been in vain. There was no march to be stolen, even with Moir lying helpless on the snow. He would have to go through with it as he had planned. Tillie and Neopa must be the means by which he would obtain his ends.

He suddenly looked over to the sledge where the two women were patiently waiting with the food they had prepared. Tillie, squat and stolid, was sitting as impassive and content as a bronze figure at the door of the shelter tepee which she had erected, but Neopa sat bowed over on the end of the sledge, her head on her folded arms, her slim figure shaking with silent sobs.

"Put back the food and go to your blankets," he commanded harshly. "Stop that whining, girl, or you will have something to whine for."

He waited until his orders had been obeyed and the women were in the tepee. Then he unrolled his blanket and lay down on the snow.

He did not sleep. He knew that he would not. For all through the day, during his dealing with Moir, on the night trail under the clean stars, his mind had been fighting to shut out a picture that persisted in running before his eyes. Now, alone in the star-lit night, with nothing to occupy him, the picture rushed into being, vivid and living. He could not shut it out. He could not escape it. It was the picture of Hattie MacGregor as he had seen her that morning with the pain and scorn upon her young, fine face. Her voice rang in his ears, the burning words as clear as if she stood by his side:

"I knew it was not a man. Living on your squaws! And you dared to talk to me —a decent woman!"

Reivers cursed and lay looking straight up at the white stars. From the tepee there came a sound that brought him up sitting. He listened, amazed and puzzled. It was Neopa sobbing because she had been torn from her young lover, Nawa, and in the plaint of her pain-racked tones there was something which recalled with accursed clearness the rich voice of Hattie MacGregor.

IT WAS probably an hour after he had lain down that Reivers rose up and quietly hooked his strongest dogs to a sledge.

"Tillie! Neopa! Come out!" he whispered, throwing open the flap of the little tepee.

Neopa came, wet-faced and haggard, her wide-open eyes showing plainly that there had been no sleep for her that night. Tillie was rubbing her eyes sleepily, protesting against being wakened from comfortable slumber.

Reivers pointed northward up the river bed.

"Up there, on this river, one day's march

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away, is the camp of your people, which we came from," he whispered. "Do you both take this team and drive rapidly thither. Hold to the river-bed and keep away from the black spots where the water shows through the snow. Do not stop to rest or feed. You should reach your people in the middle of the afternoon. Then do you give Nawa this rifle. Tell him to shoot any white man who comes after you. Now go swiftly."

Neopa looked at him with her fawn-like eyes large with incredibility and hope.

"Snow Burner! Do you let me go back to Nawa?" she whispered.

"Get on the sledge," he commanded. "Do as I've told you, or you'll hear from me."

As emotion had all but paralyzed the young girl he forced her to a seat on the sledge and thrust the whip into her hand, then turned to Tillie. Tillie was making no move to approach the sledge.

"Did you hear what I said?" he demanded.

Tillie smiled strangely.

"Has the Snow Burner become afraid of Iron Hair?" she asked.

"So little afraid that I no longer need you to help me in this matter," retorted Reivers.

The shrewd squaw shook her head.

"How will the Snow Burner find Iron Hair's gold now? Iron Hair will not take the Snow Burner to his camp alone. It is not the Snow Burner that Iron Hair wants. It is a woman. Has the Snow Burner given up the fight to get the gold which he wants so much? He knows he can not reach Iron Hair's camp—alone."

"Then I will not reach it at all. Get on the sledge."

Tillie smiled but did not move.

"The Snow Burner at last has become like other white men. He wishes to do what is right." She pointed at the snoring Moir. "He would not be so weak."

While Reivers looked at her in amazement the squaw stepped forward, straightened out the dogs, kicked them viciously and sent the sledge, bearing Neopa alone, flying up the river-bed.

"To send Neopa back to Nawa is well and good," she said returning to Reivers. "She would weep for Nawa all day and night, and would grow sick and die on our hands. But there is no Nawa waiting for Tillie. Tillie is tired of her tepee with no man in it. Iron Hair has smiled upon me, Snow Burner. I will smile upon him. His smile will answer mine as the dry pine lights up when the match is touched to it. I have looked in his eyes and know. He will forget Neopa. Tillie will help the Snow Burner rob Iron Hair. Is it well?"

"Get back to your blankets," commanded Reivers. "If you wish it, we will let it be so. Sleep long. Do not stir until you hear that Iron Hair has awakened."

CHAPTER XVI

INTO THE JAWS OF THE BEAR

SHANTY MOIR stirred when the first rays of the morning sun, glancing off the snow, struck his eyes. He rose like a musk-ox lifting itself from its snow wallow, with mighty heaves and grunts, and looked around.

He was blear-eyed and puffed of face, his throat was raw and burning from the unbelievable amount of hooch he had swallowed in the night, but his abnormal organization had thrown off the effects of the alcohol and he was cold sober. His first move was to cool his throat with handfuls of snow, his second to step over and regard the apparently paralyzed Reivers with a look of mingled triumph and contempt.

"Eh, old sonny! Would a drinked with Shanty Moir, wouldst 'ee?" he chuckled. "Happen thee got thy old soak's skin filled to overflow that time. Get up, you waster!" he commanded, stirring the prostrate form with a heavy foot. "Up with you!"

Reivers did not stir, but he put that touch of the foot down as something extra that Moir would have to pay for. He was apparently lying steeped in the depths of drunken slumber, and he wished to drive the impression firmly into Shanty Moir's mind that he had been dead to the world all night. Hence he did not interrupt his snoring as Moir's foot touched him.

"Laid out stiff!" laughed Moir.

He reached down, lifted Reivers' head from the snow and let it fall heavily. Still Reivers made no sign of awakening. Moir looked at him for a moment, then slily tiptoed toward the shelter tepee and threw up the flap. The next instant a bellow of rage shattered the morning quiet. Like a maddened bear Moir was back at Reivers,

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cuffing, kicking, cursing, commanding that he wake up.

Reivers awoke only in degree. Not until Moir had opened a new bottle of hooch and poured a drink down his throat did he essay to sit up and open his eyes.

"Wha' smatter? Can't a man shleep?" he protested. "Wha' smatter with you?"

"Matter!" bellowed Moir. "Plenty of matter, you old waster. Where's the young lass, eh? Where's the girl gone? Look in the tepee and see what's the matter. You told me you had the trulls buffaloed. What's become of the young girl?"

It was some time before Reivers appeared to understand. Finally he stumbled to his feet and started toward the tent, met Tillie as she stepped out rubbing her eyes, and recoiled drunkenly.

"Neopa? Where is she?" muttered Tillie. "She slept near the door. Now she is gone."

She had let her shiny black hair fall loosely over her shoulders and now she threw it back, looked straight at Moir and smiled.

"Neopa gone?" demanded Reivers thickly. "She can't be; she wouldn't dare."

"Dare, you fool? Look there." Moir pointed to the hollows where the missing dog team had lain and to the tracks that ran straight and true up the river bed. "She's run away. Been gone half a night. Well, what have you got to say?"

Reivers turned with a scowl on Tillie, but Tillie was comfortably plaiting her thick hair.

"Neopa has run away—back to our people," she said with a smile, as she turned back into the tepee. "Tillie does not run away," she added as she disappeared.

Moir sat down on a sledge and cursed Reivers steadily for five minutes, but at every few words his eyes would stray back to the tepee which hid Tillie.

"We'll go after her," said Reivers. "We'll bring her back."

"Go after her!" snorted Moir. "She has half a night's start on us. She'll reach her people before we could get her. Do you think I want half the country following my trail."

"I'll go after her alone then," insisted Reivers.

"Will you?" Moir's eyes narrowed to slits. "I think not. Let me tell thee something, old son: he who goes this far on the home trail with Shanty Moir goes all the way. Understand? You'll come with me or you'll be wolf-meat out here on the snow. No; there'll be no following of that kid. She's gone. The other one's here. There is no telling what tale the kid will spin when she meets people, or who will be down here looking for our trail. Therefore we are going to travel and travel quick. Have the squaw get food in a hurry. Get your dogs together. We'll be on the trail in half an hour."

Moir was masterful and dominant now. It was evident that he was more worried over the possibility of some one hearing of his whereabouts through Neopa than he was over the girl's escape. He gave Reivers a second drink of liquor, since he seemed to need it to fully awaken him, and set about making ready for the trail.

"Eat plenty," he commanded, when Tilly served the cold meat and tea. "The next meal you have will be about sundown."

He tore down the tepee, packed the sledges and had the outfit ready for the start in an amazingly short while.

"Now, old son," he said quietly, pointing to the rifle that lay uncovered on top of his sledge, "do 'ee take good look at her. She's a good old Betsy and I've knocked o'er smaller men than you at the half mile. Do you keep well up with me on the trail I'll be making this day and there'll be no trouble. Try any tricks and the wolves will have whisky-soaked meat to feed on. There's no turning back now. He who comes this far with Shanty Moir goes all the way."

"You can't lose me, mister," stammered Reivers. "I want that money for hooch for next Summer like you promised."

"Wilt get more than you bargained for, old son," laughed Moir. "Yes, more than you ever dreamed of. Hi-yah! Buck! Bugle! Mush; mush up!"

MOIR made no pretense at hiding his trail when he started this time. Apparently he reasoned that the damage was done. If any one wished to trail him after hearing Neopa's story they would have no trouble in finding his tracks, despite any subterfuge he might attempt. He went straight forward, as a man who has nothing to fear if he can but reach his fastness, and Reivers' wonderment grew as the trail held straight toward the rising sun.

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The course was parallel to the one he had taken westward from MacGregor's cabin to Tillie's encampment. If it held on as it was going it would lead straight into the heart of the Dead Lands, and within half a day's travel of the MacGregor home. Was it possible that the mine lay in the Dead Lands? Duncan MacGregor made this territory his trapping-ground. How could his brother's find have escaped his trained outdoor eyes?

The next instant Reivers was cursing himself for a blind fool. There was no trapping in the Dead Lands. There was no feed there. Except for a stray wolf-cave, fur-bearing beasts would shun those barren rocks as a desert, and Duncan MacGregor, being a knowing trapper, might trap around it twenty years without venturing through after a first fruitless search for signs.

The mine was in the Dead Lands, of course. It was as safely hidden there as if within the bowels of the earth. And he, Reivers, had probably been within shooting distance of it during his two days' wandering in that district. The man whom he had killed with the rock had undoubtedly been hurrying with Hattie MacGregor straight to his chief's fastness.

It was noon when the ragged ground on the horizon-head told Reivers that his surmises were correct and that they were hurrying straight for the Dead Lands. An hour of travel and the jagged formation of the rock country was plainly distinguishable a little over a mile ahead. Then Moir for the first time that day called a halt. When Reivers caught up with him he saw that Moir held in each hand a small pouch-like contrivance of buckskin, pierced near the middle with tiny holes and equipped with draw-strings at the bottom.

"Come here, lass," he beckoned to Tillie. "Must hide that smiling mouth of thine for the present."

With a laugh he threw the pouch over the squaw's head, pulled the bottom tightly around her neck, and tied the strings securely.

"The same with thee, old son," he said, and treated Reivers in the same summary manner. "You see, I do not wish to have to put you away," he explained genially, "and that I would do if by chance thy eyes should see the way to Shanty Moir's mine. One or two men have been unlucky enough to see it. They will never be able to tell the tale." He skilfully searched the pair for hidden weapons, but Reivers had expected this and carried not so much as a knife. "All right. Keep in my steps, old son. Presently thou'll get wet. Do not fear. Wilt not let 'ee come to harm. Neither thee nor tuh squaw. I have use for you both. Come now; I'll go slow."

The buckskin pouch pierced only by the tiny air-holes, masked Reivers' eyes in a fashion that precluded any possible chance of sight. He knew instinctively that Moir was turning. First the turn was to the left. Then back to the right. Then in a circle, and after that straight ahead.

Presently the feel of a sharp rock underfoot told him that they had entered the Dead Lands. He stumbled purposely to one side of the trail and bumped squarely against a solid wall of stone. Next he tried it on the opposite side with the same result. Moir was leading the way through a narrow defile in the rocks.

Suddenly there came to Reivers' ears the sound of running water, the lazy murmur of a small brook. Almost at the same instant came the splash of Moir and his dogs going into the stream and Moir's laughing:

"Wilt get a little wet here, old son. But follow on."

Fumbling with his feet Reivers found the stream and stepped in. To his surprise the water was warm. Warm water? Where had he seen warm water recently in this country? His thoughts leaped back with a snap. There was only one open stream to be found thereabouts, and that was the brook that came from the warm springs by which he had camped on his way to Tillie's.

"Warm water!" laughed Moir. "Wilt find all snug in my camp. Aye, as snug as in a well-kept jail."

The stream was knee-deep, and by the pressure of the water against the back of his legs Reivers knew that they were going down-stream. Presently Moir spoke again.

"Now, if you value the tops of your heads, do you duck as low as you can. Duck now, quick; and do you keep that position till I tell you to straighten up."

Reivers and Tillie ducked obediently. Suddenly the tiny light that had come through the air-holes of their masks was shut out. The darkness was complete. Reivers thrust his hand above his bowed head and came in contact with cold, clammy rock. No wonder it had taken MacGregor and Moir two years to find the mine, since

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the way to it lay by a subterranean river!

The light reappeared, but it was not the sunny light that had come through the air-holes before they had entered the river tunnel. It was gray and dead, as the light in a room where the sunshine does not enter.

"Now you can lift your heads," laughed Moir. "Come to the right. Up the bank. Here we are."

He jerked Reivers out of the water roughly, and roughly pulled the sack from his head. Reivers blinked as the light struck his eyes. Moir treated him to a generous kick.

"Welcome," he hissed menacingly. "Welcome to the camp of Shanty Moir."

CHAPTER XVII

MACGREGOR ROY

REIVERS' first impression was that he was standing in a gigantic stockade. The second that he was on the floor of a great quarry-pit. Then, when the situation grew clear to him, he stood dumfounded.

The camp of Shanty Moir lay in what would have been a solid rock cave but for the lack of a roof. It was an irregular hollow in the strange formation of the Dead Lands, perhaps fifty yards long and thirty yards wide at its greatest breadth. The hollow was surrounded completely by ragged stone walls about fifty feet in height. These walls slanted inward to a startling degree. Thus while the floor of the strange spot was thirty yards wide, the opening above, through which showed the far-away sky, could scarcely have been more than half that width. The brook ran through the middle of the chasm, entering the upper end by a tunnel five feet in height and disappearing in the solid wall of rock at the lower end by a similar opening.

On each side of the narrow stream, and running back to the rock walls, was a floor of smooth river-sand. Beneath an overhanging ledge on the side where Reivers stood were the rude skin fronts of two dugouts. A tin smoke-stack protruded from the larger of the two habitations; the other, which was high enough only to admit a man stooping far over, was merely a flap of hide hanging down from the rock.

On the beach at the other side of the creek a fire burned beneath a great iron pan, the wood smoke filling the chasm with its pungent odor. Behind the fire a series of tunnels ran down in the sand under the cliffs. From the tunnel immediately behind the fire came a thin spiral of sluggish smoke, and Reivers knew that this tunnel was being worked and that the fire was being used to thaw the frozen earth.

A man who resembled Moir on a small scale was at work at the thawing-pan, breaking the hard earth with his fingers and tossing it into a washing-pan at his side. He stood now with a chunk of frozen sand in his hand, and at the sight of Reivers and Tillie he tossed the sand recklessly into the air and whooped.

"Ha! Hast done well this time, Shanty," he cried in an accent similar to theirs. "Hast made tuh life endurable. A new horse for me and a woman for 'ee. 'Tis high time. Since Blacky went off and did not come back, and tuh two Indians tried to flee, we've had but one horse to do with. Now wilt have two. Wilt clean up in a hurry now, and live in tuh meanwhile."

Shanty Moir laughed harshly.

"How works tuh old Scot jackass today?" he called.

The man across the creek shook his head.

"He's never tuh horse he was when we first put him in harness," he chuckled. "Fell twice in his tracks today, he did, and lay there till Joey gave him an inch of tuh prod. Has been a good beastie, the Scot has, Shanty, but 'tis in my mind tuh climate does not 'gree with him. Scarce able to pull his load. In tuh mines at home we knocked such worn beasties in the head and sent them up o' tuh pit."

Moir laughed again.

"Hast a quaint way o' putting things, Tammy," he said. "But I mind when ponies were scarce we used them till they crawled their knees raw. 'Tis plenty o' time to knock old horse-flesh in tuh head when tuh job's done."

They laughed together. Evidently this was a well-liked camp joke.

"'Tis a well-coupled animal 'ee have there, Shanty," said the humorist across the water, with a jerk of the head at Reivers. "Big in tuh bone and solid around tuh withers. Yon squaw is a solid piece, too. Happen they're broke to pull double?"

"Unbroke stock, Tammy," drawled Moir leisurely. "Gentleman, squaw-man, waster. But breaking stock's our specialty, eh, Tammy?"

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A muffled shout floated up from the mouth of the smoking pit before Tammy could reply. Instantly there followed a dull moan of pain: Moir and Tammy laughed knowingly.

"Here comes sample of our work," said Tammy, nodding toward the tunnel. "Poor Joey! Has to use tuh prod to start him with each load now."

A grating, shuffling sound now came from the mouth of the tunnel. Following it appeared the head of a man. And Reivers needed only one glance at the emaciated countenance to know that he was looking upon the father of Hattie MacGregor.

"Giddap, Scotch jackass!" roared Moir in great good humor. "Pull it out o' there. That's tuh horse. Pull!"

The man came painfully, an inch at a time, out of the pit, and looked across the creek at Shanty Moir. Behind him there dragged a rough wooden sledge loaded with lumps of earth. The man was hitched to this load by a harness of straps that held his arms helpless against his sides. No strait-jacket ever held its victim more utterly helpless than the contrivance which now held James MacGregor in toils as a beast of burden. A contrivance of straps about the ankles held his legs close together.

So short were the traces by which the sledge was drawn that MacGregor could not have stood upright without having lifted the heavy load a foot or more from the ground. He made no attempt to stand so, but hung half-bowed against the harness, his eyes gleaming through the matted red hair over his brows straight at Shanty Moir.

It was the eyes that drew and held Reivers' attention to the face, rather than to the man's terrible situation. James MacGregor, helpless beast of burden to his tormentors that he was, was not beaten. The same clean-cut nose, mouth and chin that Reivers remembered so well in the daughter were apparent in the father's pain-marked face. The eyes gleamed defiance. And they were wide and gray, Reivers saw, the same as the eyes that haunted him in memory's pictures of the girl who had not feared his glance.

"Shanty Moir," spoke MacGregor in a voice weak but firm, "when the devil made you he cursed his own work. He cursed you as a misbegotten thing not fit for hell. The gut-eating wolverine is a brave beast compared to you. Skunks would run from your company. You think you have done big work. You fool! You cannot rob me of what belongs to me and mine; you cannot kill me. As sure as there is a God in Heaven, He will let me or mine kill you with bare hands."

Moir and his man laughed in weary fashion, as if this speech were old to them, and Reivers was amazed at an impulse within him to throw himself at Shanty Moir's throat. He joined foolishly in the laughter to hide his confusion. What had he to do with such impulses? What business had he having any feeling for the poor enslaved man before him? He had come to Moir's camp for one purpose: to get the gold mined there, to get a new start in life. Was it possible that he was growing weak enough to experience the feeling of pity, the impulse to help the helpless? Nonsense! He laughed loudly. His plan was one in which silly impulses of this nature had no part, and he would go through with it to the end.

"Well brayed, Scots jackass," said the man at the thawing-pan casually. "Now pull tuh load over here. Giddap—pull!"

MacGregor leaned weakly against the harness, but the sledge had lodged and his depleted strength was insufficient to budge it.

"Oh ho! Getting lazy, eh?" came from the tunnel, and a thin-faced man came out, a short stick with a sharp brad in his hands. "Want help, eh? Well, here 'tis," he chuckled, and drove the brad into MacGregor's leg.

Again the strange impulse to leap to the tortured man's rescue, to kill his tormentor without reckoning the price or what might come after, stirred itself in Reivers' breast, and again he joined in the laughter to pass it off.

MacGregor started as the iron entered his flesh and the movement loosened the sledge. With weak, faltering steps he drew the load alongside the fire, where Tammy proceeded to transfer the frozen chunks of earth to the thawing-pan.

"Eh, hah! New cattle?" said the man with the prod when he espied Reivers and Tillie. "Cow and bull."

"Cow—and an old ox, Joey," laughed Moir. "Has even burnt his horns off with hooch, and wilt go well in the harness when he's broke."

"'Tis time," said Joey. "Tuh Scots jackass'll soon drop in his tracks."

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"Not until I've paid you out in full, you devils," said MacGregor quietly. "I'll give you an hour of living hell for every prod you've given me, you poor cur."

Joey approached him and unhooked the traces from his harness with an air that told how well he was accustomed to such threats.

"Must call it a day, Shanty," he said, loosening the straps that bound MacGregor's hands so the forearms were free while the upper arms remained bound tightly to his sides. "Old pit's full o' smoke." In bored sort of fashion he kicked MacGregor into the creek. "To your stable, jackass. Day's done."

MacGregor, tripped by the straps about his ankles, fell full length in the water, floundered across, and crawled miserably out of sight behind the skin front of the smaller dugout. Moir and his two henchmen watched him, jeering and laughing. At a sign the two on the other side of the creek came across and drew close to their chief.

"And now, old son," snarled Moir, swinging around on Reivers like a flash, "now, you slick waster—now we'll attend to 'ee."

CHAPTER XVIII

JAMES MACGREGOR'S STORY

THE three men moved forward until they were within arm's reach of Reivers, and stood regarding him with open grins on their hairy faces. Reivers, reading the import of their grins, knew that they were bent upon enjoying themselves at his expense, and tried swiftly to guess what form their amusement might take. If it were only horse-play he would be able to continue in the helpless character he had assumed. If it were to be rougher than that, if they set out to break him in real earnest, he feared that his acting was at an end.

Even for the sake of the gold that he was after he would hardly be able to submit, humbly and helplessly as became a drunken squaw-man, to their efforts to make a wreck of him. He calculated his chances of coming through alive if the situation developed to this extreme, and decided that the odds were a trifle too heavy against him.

The element of surprise would be on his side, but his right shoulder still was weak from the old bullet-wound. With his terrible ability to use his feet he calculated that he could drop Moir and Tammy with broken bones as they rushed him. To do that he would have to drop to his back, and Joey, the third man, wore a long skinning-knife on his hip. No, if he began to fight he would never get what he had come after. He wiped his mouth furtively and swayed from the knees up.

"I want some hooch, mister, that's what I want," he whined shakily. "You promised you'd give me a drink when we got here, you know you did. Haven't had a drop since morning. I wouldn't 'a' come if I'd known you were going to treat me like this."

Then he did the best acting of his life. He jumped sideways and shuddered; he frantically plucked imaginary bugs off his coat sleeve; he stepped high as if stepping over something on the ground; his eyes and face muscles worked spasmodically.

"O-ooh! Gimme a drink," he begged. "Please gimme a drink. I gotta have it."

The grins faded from the faces before him. They knew full well the signs of incipient delirium tremens. Tammy laughed dryly.

"Hast brought home more than an old ox and a cow, Shanty," he said. "Hast brought a whole menagerie. Yon stick'll have tuh Wullies in a minute if he's not liquored."

Reivers dropped to his knees, shuddering, his arms shielding his eyes from imaginary beasts of the bottle.

"Take 'em away, boys," he pleaded. "Kill the big ones, let the little ones go."

With a snarl Moir leaped to his sledge and knocked the neck off a bottle of hooch.

"Drink, you scut!" he growled. "I'll have dealings with you when you're sobered up."

Reivers drank and began to doze. Moir kicked him upright.

"Get into the shed with t'other jackass," he commanded, propelling him toward the dugout into which MacGregor had crawled. "And in tuh morning you go to work, e'en though snakes be crawling all o'er 'ee."

A faintly muttered curse greeted Reivers as he crawled into the dugout.

"You poor curs! What do you want with me now?" came MacGregor's voice from a corner of the tiny room. "You skunk——"

"Easy, MacGregor Roy," whispered Reivers quietly. "It's not one of the 'skunks.' "

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"MacGregor Roy!" By the light that entered by a slit in the skin-flap Reivers could see the Scotchman painfully lifting his head from his miserable bunk, as he hoarsely repeated his own name. "MacGregor Roy! Who are you, stranger, to call James MacGregor by his family name?"

"I'm the man that Shanty Moir brought in this afternoon," whispered Reivers.

"I know, I know," gasped MacGregor weakly. "But men do not call me MacGregor Roy. James MacGregor they call me, unless—unless——"

"Unless they have the 'Roy' straight from the lips of your daughter, Hattie."

For a full minute MacGregor sat stricken speechless.

"Man, man! Speak!" The unfortunate man came wriggling over and laid his hands pleadingly on Reivers. "Don't play with me. Is my daughter Hattie alive and well?"

"Very much alive," replied Reivers, "and as well as can be expected of a girl who is worrying her heart out over why her father doesn't return or send her word."

"Have they no' guessed—has no' my brother Duncan guessed by this time?" gasped MacGregor. "Can not they understand that I must be dead or held captive since I do not return? Speak, man, tell me how 'tis with them!"

REIVERS waited until the poor man had become more quiet before replying to him.

"You'd better quiet down a little MacGregor," he whispered then. "You can't tell when your friends might be listening, and it wouldn't do either of us any good if they heard what we're saying."

"True," said the old man more quietly. "I'm acting like an old woman. But for three months I've been trapped like this, and my head fairly swims when I hear you speak of Hattie. How come you to know of her."

Reivers related briefly that he had been ill and had been cared for at the MacGregor cabin.

"And my little Hattie is well? No harm came to her from the black devil they sent to steal her? You must know, man, they taunted me by sending——"

"I know," interrupted Reivers; and he told how he had disposed of the kidnaper.

"You—you did that?" MacGregor clutched Reivers's hand. "You saved my little Hattie?"

"None of that," snapped Reivers, snatching away his hand. "I did nothing for your little Hattie. Why should I? What is your Hattie to me? I simply put that blackbeard out of business because I needed food and he had it on the sledge."

"Yet you're not one of the gang here—now? You are no' anything but a friend of me and mine?"

"A friend?" sneered Reivers. "I'll tell you, Mac: I'm here as my own friend, absolutely nothing else."

"But Hattie—and my brother Duncan—they understand about me now?"

"They know you're either dead or worse," was the reply. "And they're at Dumont's Camp now, waiting for Moir to come there on a spree, when they expect to trail him back to this camp."

MacGregor nodded his head weakly.

"Aye. Taken the trail for revenge. No less could be expected. Please Heaven, they'll soon win here. And James MacGregor will not forget what he owes you, stranger, for the help you gave his daughter, when the time of reckoning comes with Moir and his poor curs."

Reivers laughed coldly under his breath.

"You speak pretty confidently, old-timer, for a man who's trussed up the way you are."

"God willna let this dog of a Moir have his will with me much longer," said the Scot firmly. "It isna posseeble."

" 'This dog of a Moir' must be a better man than you are," taunted Reivers. "He fooled you and trapped you as soon as you'd found this mine."

"Did he?" MacGregor flared up. "Shanty Moir a better man than me? Hoot, no! He fooled me, yes, for I didna know that he'd got word to these three hellions of his that the mine was here. I trusted him; he was my pardner. And when we returned with proveesions for the Winter the three devils were waiting for us, just inside the wall, where the creek comes through. Shanty Moir alone never could ha' done it. The three of them jumped on me from above. I had no chance. Then they strapped me.

"They've kept me strapped ever since. I'm draft beast for them. Twice a day they feed me. And between whiles Shanty Moir taunts me by playing before my eyes with the dust and nuggets that are half mine."

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"Oh, well, it doesn't look to me as if there'd be enough gold here to bother about," said Reivers casually. "It's nothing but a little freak pocket by the looks of it."

"So it is. A freak pocket. It could be nothing else in this district. 'Twas only by chance we found it, exploring the creek in here out of curiosity. 'Twas in the bowels of the warm spring up yon, where the creek starts, that the pocket was originally. The spring boiled it out into the creek, and the creek washed it down here in its bed of sand. The sand lodged here, against these rock walls. There's about a hundred feet of the sand, running down under the cliffs, and it's all pocket. Not a rich pocket, as you say, but Shanty Moir is filthy with nuggets and dust now, and there'll be some more in the sand that's left to work over.

"Not a bonanza, man, but a good-sized fortune. 'Twould be enough to send my Hattie to school. 'Twould give her all the comforts of the world. 'Twould make folk look up to her. And Shanty Moir, the devil's spawn, has it in his keeping."

"And he'll probably see that it continues in his keeping, too," yawned Reivers.

"Never!" swore MacGregor, rising to the bait. "Shanty Moir did me dirt too foul to prosper by it, and I'm a better man than he is, besides. The stuff will come into my hands, where it belongs, some way. I dinna see just how for the present. But the stuff, and my revenge I will have. E'en shackled as I am I'll have my revenge, though it's only to bite the windpipe out of Shanty Moir's throat like a mad dog."

"Huh!" Reivers was lying face down on some blankets, apparently but little interested. "And suppose you do get Shanty Moir? What good will that do you? I'll bet Shanty's got the gold hid where nobody could find it without getting directions from him. Suppose you get him. Suppose you get all three of 'em. Shanty Moir being dead, the nuggets and dust probably'd be as completely lost as they were before you two boys found the pocket in the first place."

For a long time MacGregor sat in his corner of the dugout without replying. Reivers could see that at times he raised his head, even opened his mouth as if to speak, then sank back undecided. At last he hunched himself forward inch by inch to the front of the dugout and lifted the flap.

The light of day had gone from the cavern. On the sand before the larger dugout blazed a brisk cooking-fire. In the confined space the light from its flames was magnified, reflecting from rock-wall and running water, and illuminating brightly the miserable hole in which Reivers and MacGregor lay.

MacGregor held up the flap for several minutes, studying Reivers, and though Reivers looked back with the look in his eyes that made most men quail, the old man's sharp gray eyes studied him unruffled, even as the eyes of his daughter had done before.

"By the Big Nail, 'tis a man's man!" muttered MacGregor, dropping the flap at last. "How in the name of self-respect did the likes of you fall prey to the cur, Shanty Moir?"

"Self-respect?" sniggered Reivers. "Did you notice me out there when you were laying your curse on Moir?"

"Aye. You were far gone in liquor then —by the looks of you. You'll mind I say 'by the looks of you.' You are not in liquor now. That's what puzzled. A man does not throw off a load of hooch so quickly. You were playing at being drunk. Now, why might that be?"

"To enable me to get into this hole and leave Moir thinking I'm a drunken squawman without brains or nerve enough to do anything but sponge for hooch."

"Aye? And your reason for that?"

"My reason for that?" Reivers laughed under his breath. "Why, did you ever hear of a more popular reason for a man risking his throat than gold? I heard the story of this deal from your brother Duncan and your daughter. I need—or rather, I want money. Shanty Moir had won over you and had gold. I came to win over Moir and get the gold away from him. Isn't that simple?"

"Simple and spoken well," said MacGregor calmly. "Will you answer me one question: Did you serve notice on my brother Duncan that you were out on this hunt?"

"I did."

"Fair enough again. A man has a right to take trail and do what he can if he speaks out fair. I take it you hardly calculated to find me here alive?"

"No, I didn't think Moir was such an amateur as to take any chances."

"Ah, he needed a draft beast, lad; that's

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why I'm alive, and no other reason. And finding me here alive, does it alter your plans any?"

"Only a trifle. You see, I'd made up my mind to bring Moir and your daughter Hattie face to face to see if she could make good on her big talk of taking revenge for putting you out of business. Now that I see you're still alive—well, I won't let any little foolishness like that interfere with the business I've come on."

"I mean about the gold, man?"

Reivers looked at his questioner in surprise.

"About the gold?" he repeated.

"Yes. Finding me, the rightful owner of half of the gold, here, alive and hoping to win back with my share to my daughter Hattie—does it make any change in your plans?"

Reivers chuckled softly.

"Not in the slightest," he replied. "I came to get the stuff that's come out of this mine. Take a look at me. Do I look like a soft fool who'd let anything interfere with my plans?"

MacGregor looked and shook his head, puzzled.

"I dinna understand ye, mon," he said. "I canna make you out. By the look of you I'd be wishful to strike hands with you as one good man to another; but your talk, man, is all wrong, all wrong. Half of the stuff that's been taken out of this mine—Shanty Moir's half—I have made up my mind shall be yours for the strong blow you dealt to save my Hattie from black shame. Will you na' strike hands on a partnership like that between us?"

Reivers yawned.

"Why should I? You're 'all in.' You can't help me any. I'll have to do the job of getting the gold away from Moir. I came here to get it all. I don't want any help, and I certainly won't make any unnecessary split."

"Man," whispered MacGregor in horror, "is there naught but a piece of ice where your heart should be? Do you not understand it's for a poor, unprovided girl I'm talking? A man you might rob; but have you the coldness in your heart to rob my little, unfortunate Hattie?"

" 'Little, unfortunate Hattie!' " mocked Reivers. "Consider her robbed already. What then?"

"A word to Shanty Moir and you're as good as dead," retorted MacGregor hotly.

Reivers' long right arm shot out and terrible fingers clutched MacGregor's his throat. The old man wriggled and gasped and tried to cry out, but Reivers held him voiceless and helpless and smiled.

"One word to Shanty Moir, and—you see?" he said, releasing his hold. "Then your little, unfortunate Hattie would be robbed for sure."

"Man — man — what are you, man or devil?" gasped MacGregor.

"Devil, if it suits you," said Reivers. "But, remember, I'll manage to be within reach of you when Shanty Moir's about, and I rather fancy Moir would be glad to have me put you out of business. Now listen to me. I've no objection to your getting out of here alive—if you can. I've no objection to your getting your revenge on Moir, if you can, provided that none of this interferes with my getting what I came after. You know now what I can and will do if necessary. Your life lies right there." He opened and closed his right hand significantly. "Well, I'll trade you your life for a little information. Where does Shanty keep his gold?"

MacGregor ceased gasping. He began to laugh. He leaned over and laughed. He rocked from side to side.

"Man, man! Do you not know that? That proves you're only human!" he chuckled. "You came out here, like a lamb led to slaughter, to find where Shanty Moir keeps his gold. You were on the trail with Shanty. You had him where it was only one man to one. Well—well, the joke is too good to keep: Shanty Moir, day and night, wears a big buckskin belt about the middle of him, and the gold—the gold is in the belt!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE WHITE MAN'S SENTIMENT

IT WAS very still in the dugout. Suddenly Reivers leaned forward to see if MacGregor were telling the truth. Satisfied with his scrutiny he sat back and laughed softly.

"In a belt, around his middle, eh?" he said. "Good work. Mr. Moir is cautious enough to be interesting."

"Cautious!" MacGregor threw up the flap of the dugout. "Look out there, man."

Reivers looked. On the sand directly

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before the door lay chained a huge, husky dog, an ugly, starved brute with mad eyes.

"Try but to crawl outside the shack," suggested MacGregor.

Reivers tried. His head had no more than appeared outside when the dog sprang. The chain jerked him back as his teeth clashed where Reivers' head had been. He leaped thrice more, striving to hurl himself into the dugout, then returned to his place and lay down, growling.

"Very cautious," agreed Reivers.

He peered carefully out toward the cooking-fire. The fire had died down now and was deserted. By the sounds coming from the larger dugout Reivers knew that Moir and his men were occupied with their supper, supplemented by occasional drafts of liquor, and once more he crawled out upon the sand.

With a snarl the great dog leaped again, his bared fangs flashing in the night. The snarl died in a choke. Reivers' long arms flashed out and his fingers caught the dog by the throat so swiftly and surely that not another sound came from between its teeth. It was a big, strong dog and it died hard, but out there on the sand Reivers sat, silently keeping his hold till the last sign of life had gone from the brute's body. Not a sound rose to attract attention from the larger dugout.

When the animal was quite dead Reivers crawled forward and untied the chain that held it to a rock. Noiselessly he crawled farther on and noiselessly slipped the carcass into the brook. The brisk current caught it and dragged it down. Reivers waited until he saw the thing disappear into the dark tunnel at the lower end of the cavern, then returned to the dugout and quietly lay down on his blankets.

"God's blood!" gasped MacGregor and sat silent.

"Well," yawned Reivers, "our friend Moir is short one dog."

"You crazy fool!" MacGregor was grinding his teeth. "Ha' you no' thought of what Shanty Moir will do when he finds what you've done to his watch-dog?"

"What I have done?" Reivers laughed his idiotic squaw-man's laugh. "D'you suppose a poor old bum like me could throttle a man-eater like that beast? You'll be the one to be blamed for it. Why should I touch Moir's dog? Moir and I came here together, chummy as a couple of thieves."

"You would not—you could not do that? You could not put it on me? Man, they'd drop me in the river after the beast, if you got them to believe it."

"Well?" said Reivers gently.

The Scot bit his lip and grew crafty.

"Well," he said, "there'd be only you left then to do the dirt-hauling for Shanty Moir."

Reivers nodded appreciatively.

"You deserve something for that, Mac," said he.

He lay silent for a few minutes. Then he chuckled suddenly as if he had thought of a good joke.

"Watch me closely now, Mac," he ordered, "and if you ever feel like speaking that word to Moir, I'll holler at you worse than this."

He rolled himself to the front of the dugout, and suddenly there rang out in the cavern such a shriek of terror as stopped the blood in the veins of all who heard. Twice Reivers uttered his horrible cry. Then he began to shout drunkenly:

"Take him off, take him away! Oh, oh, oh! Big dog coming out of the river. Take him away. Big dog swimming in the river. Take him away. Help, help!"

Shanty Moir got to the front of the little dugout in advance of the others. He came with a six-shooter in his hand, and the gun covered Reivers, huddled up on the sand, as steadily as if held in a vise. But Reivers observed that Moir stopped well out of reach.

"What tuh ——!" roared Moir, as he noted the absence of the watch-dog. "What devil's work——"

"The dog!" chattered Reivers. "Big dog; big as a house. Came out of the river. Tried to jump on me. Jumped back into the river. Swimming — swimming out there."

Shanty Moir swung the muzzle of his six-shooter till it pointed straight at Reivers's forehead. He did not step forward, but remained well out of reach.

"Steady, old son," he said quietly, "steady, or this'll go off."

Under the influence of the threat Reivers pretended to come back to his senses.

"Gimme a drink, mister," he pleaded. "I'm seeing things. I was sure there was a big dog out there. I'd 'a' sworn I saw him jump into the river. Now I see there isn't, but gimme a drink—quick!"

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"Bring tuh old sow a cup of hooch, Joey," snapped Moir over his shoulder. "Wilt see about this." He turned the weapon on the cowering MacGregor. "Speak quick, Scotch jackass, or I pull trigger. What's been done here; where's Tige?"

"Was it a real dog?" cried Reivers before MacGregor could reply. "I saw something —he went into the river."

"Speak, you!" said Moir to the Scotchman. "Speak quick."

"He's telling you straight," replied MacGregor, with a nod toward Reivers. "The dog went into the river. I saw him go down, out of sight."

"Out of sight," muttered Reivers, swallowing the drink which Joey had brought him. "So it was a real dog, was it? He jumped at me, and then he jumped back, and I guess he broke his chain, because he went into the river and never came out."

Moir stepped over and examined the rock from which Reivers had slipped the dog's chain.

"Tammy," he said quietly. Tammy came obediently, stopping a good two paces away from Moir.

"See that?" said Moir, pointing at the rock. Tammy nodded.

"You tied Tige out for tuh night, Tammy?"

"Yes, but——"

"And you tied so well tuh beast got loose, and into tuh river and is lost."

"Shanty, I swear——"

"Swear all you want to, lad," said Moir and dropped him cold with a light tap on the jaw.

"Pick him up." Moir's moving revolver had seemed to cover every one present, but now the muzzle hesitated on Joey. "Carry him into tuh shack."

As Joey obeyed Moir stepped back toward the little dugout, but stopped well out of reach of a possible rush.

"Old son," he said slowly, and the gun barrel pointed at Reivers' right eye, "old son, if you yell again tonight let it be your prayers, because you'll need 'em. Dost hear? I suspect 'twas thy yelling scared Tige into the river. Wouldst send thee down after him, only I've use for you in tuh pits. Crawl in and lie still if wouldst live till daylight, —— you. Wilt pay for the loss of Tige, I warn you that."

He turned away and Reivers fell back on his blankets chuckling boyishly. He was in fine fettle. The Snow Burner was coming back to his old form, and in the delight of the moment's difficulties he had temporarily lost the softening memories that had disturbed him of late.

"How was it, old-timer?" he laughed. "Could you pick any flaw in it?"

MacGregor shook his head in wonder.

"I had a man go fey on me once, up on the Slave Lake trail," he said slowly. "Hé let go just such yells as came from your mouth now. I'm thinking no man could yell so lest he's fey himself, or has traveled wi' auld Nickie and stole some of his music."

"Quite so. Exactly the impression I wished to create," said Reivers. "I thank you for your compliment, but your analysis is all wrong. Complete control of your vocal organs, that's all. You see I wished to let out just such a yell. It was rather hard, because my vocal organs never had made such a sound before, and they protested. I forced them to do it.

"The man with the superior mind can force his body to do anything. Understand, Mac? It's the superior mind that counts. If you'd had a mind superior to Moir's you'd be top dog here, with Moir fetching bones for you. As it is, you're doing the fetching, and Moir's growing fat. And here I come along, with a mind superior to Moir's, and I'm going to be top dog now and gobble the whole proceeds of your squabbling. The mind, Mac, the gray stuff in the little bone-box at the top of your neck, that's all that counts. Nothing else. And I've got the best gray matter in this camp, and I'm going to be top dog as a matter of course."

MacGregor flared up hotly.

"You say, that's all that counts?" he said. "D'you mean to tell me to my face that after I'd struck hands with a man to be my partner, as I did with Shanty Moir, that I'd turn on him and play him the scurvy trick he played me, just because I could? Well, if you say that, mon, you lie, and I throw the word smack in your teeth. Go back on my hand-shake, just to be top dog and get the bones! God's blood! There's other things better than bones, and there's other things that count besides a superior mind. How many times do you suppose I could have shot Shanty Moir after we'd found this mine?"

"Not once. You didn't have it in you.

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You couldn't do it. If you could you'd have been the superior man, and you're not."

MacGregor thought it over.

"You're right, mon, I couldn't do it. I thank God I couldn't. I'd rather be the slave I am at present than be able to do things like that."

"Sentiment, Mac; foolish, unreasonable sentiment."

"Sentiment!" MacGregor spoke hotly, then suddenly subsided. "Yes, you're right, lad," he admitted after awhile. "It's naught but sentiment. I see now. It's the kind of sentiment that white men die for, and that makes them the boss men of the world. Well, lad, I am sorry to hear you talk as if 'twas only your skin was white. But I do not see you top dog of this camp yet. I'll warrant Shanty Moir didn't allow you to slip a gun or knife into camp. And did you notice the little tool he had in his hand?"

"A six-shooter," said Reivers. "A crude weapon compared to a good mind, MacGregor."

"Aye? I'm glad to hear you say so, lad, for I've only a mind, such as it is, left me for a weapon, and I'm quite sure I must overcome the six-gun in Shanty's hand ere I ever win back to lay eyes on my daughter Hattie."

"Your daughter Hattie!" Reivers sat up, jarred out of his composure. "You forget your daughter Hattie; you hear, MacGregor? And now shut up. There's been enough yawping tonight; I want to sleep."

He rolled himself tightly in his blankets. MacGregor crawled miserably to his corner and huddled down to sleep as best he could in his cruel shackles. The dugout grew as still as a tomb. Faint sounds came from the place where Moir and his men were living, but as the night grew older these ceased, and a silence as complete and primitive as it knew before man bent his steps thither fell over the isolated cavern.

Reivers did not sleep. MacGregor's last words had done the work. "My daughter Hattie." Hattie with the clean, pure face of her. Hattie with the wide gray eyes; with the look of pain upon her. Curse MacGregor! What business had he mentioning that name? Reivers had forgotten, or thought he had. He was himself again. And then this old fool—curse him! Curse the whole MacGregor tribe. And especially did he curse himself for being weak and foolish enough to permit such trifles to interfere with his sleep.

He dozed away toward daylight and dreamed that Hattie MacGregor was looking at him. The hard look on her face had softened a little, and she said she was glad he had sent Neopa back to her lover, Nawa.

"—— you, get out of there!"

In his half-waking Reivers fancied it was his own voice driving the picture from his mind.

"Get out, beasts, and get out quick!"

It was Shanty Moir's voice and he was calling to MacGregor and Reivers to get up.

CHAPTER XX

SHANTY MOIR—TEMPERANCE ADVOCATE

REIVERS came forth from the dugout, stooped and shaking, the drunken squaw-man's morning condition to perfection, but in reality alert and watchful for the opportunity he was seeking. He had had a bad night, and he was anxious to have the job over with and get away with his loot to some place where he could forget.

A surprise awaited him outside. Two tin plates loaded with meat and a tin cup half full of liquor were placed on the sand before the dugout. Ten feet away stood Shanty Moir, his six-shooter covering the two men as they emerged. With the instinct of the wild animal that he was, Moir knew the value of clamping his hold firmly on his victims in the cold gray of morning.

"Drink and eat," he said, satisfied with the humility with which the two went to their food. "Eat fast, or you'll go into tuh pit with tuh belly empty."

"I thought you hired me for a cook, mister," whined Reivers, as he raised the tin cup to his lips. "I want to cook."

"Cook, ——!" sneered Moir. "Tuh squaw'll do all tuh cooking done here. Draft beast with tuh Scotch jackass, that's what 'ee be, old ox. Hurry up. Wilt have a little of tuh prod?"

Out of the corner of his eye Reivers saw that MacGregor was eying the cup of liquor wistfully. Moved by an impulse that was strange to him he took a small drink and held out the cup to his companion. As MacGregor eagerly reached for it Moir's gun crashed out and the cup flew from Reivers's hand.

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"Tuh motto of this camp is, 'No treating,' " chuckled Moir. "Hooch is good on tuh trail. We're on tuh job now. You get liquor, old son, because 'tis medicine to you, and any hooch drinked here I must prescribe."

Across the creek, Tammy, at work building a fire under the thawing-pan, heard his chief's words and growled faintly.

"Yes, and 'ee prescribe terrible small doses, too, Shanty," he muttered. "A good thing can be over-played. Hast no reason for refusing Joey and me a nip before starting work this morning."

Moir, moving like a soft-footed lynx, was across the creek and behind Tammy before the latter realized what was coming. From his position Moir now dominated the whole camp, and a sickly smile appeared on Tammy's mouth.

"Aw, Shanty!" he whined. "Didst only mean it for a joke. Can take a joke from an old chum, can't 'ee, Shanty?"

"Get into tuh pit, Tammy," said Moir quietly, pointing with his gun to the tunnel where sounds indicated that Joey already was at work.

"Aw, Shanty——"

"Get in!"

Slack-jawed with terror Tammy crawled into the dark tunnel.

"Eh, Joey, ma son!" called Moir down the pit-mouth.

"Aye?" came back the answer.

"Dost 'ee, too, think 'ee should have a drink this morn'?"

"Aye, Shanty," replied the unsuspecting Joey.

"Have a hot one, then!" roared Shanty and kicked a blazing log from Tammy's fire into the pit.

A mingling of shrieks and protests greeted its arrival.

"Aw, Shanty! Blood of tuh devil, chief! Canst not take a joke?"

"Am taking it now, ma sons," laughed Moir, and kicked more brands down the tunnel.

Gasping and choking from the smoke that filled the tiny pit, Joey and Tammy essayed to crawl out. *Bang!* went Moir's six-shooter and they hastily retreated. The tunnel was filled with smoke by this time. Down at the bottom, choking coughs and cries told that the two unfortunate men were being suffocated. Moir waited until the faintness of the sounds told how far gone the men were. Then he motioned to Reivers with his revolver. The smoke was leaving the pit by this time.

"Step down and drag 'em out, old son," he said. "Come now, no hanging back. Tuh trigger on this gun is filed down so she pulls very light."

Reivers obeyed, climbing into the pit as if trembling with fear, and toiling furiously as he dragged the unconscious men out, though he could have walked away with one under each arm.

"Throw water on 'em. Splash 'em good."

Ten minutes later Joey and Tammy were sitting up, coughing and sneezing, and trying their best to make Moir believe they had only been joking.

"Good enough, ma sons; so was I," chuckled Moir. "Now back to tuh job, and if ever you doubt who's top man here you'll stay in tuh pit till you're browned well enough to eat. Dost hear me?"

"Aye, Shanty," said the two men humbly, and hurried back to their tasks.

"And now, jackass and old ox, step over here and get into tuh harness," commanded Moir.

He continued to hold the gun in his hand and motioned to the sledge near the thawing-pan. High side-boards had been placed on the sledge, making it capable of holding twice its former load, and a looped rope supplemented the traces to which MacGregor was so ignominiously hitched.

"Take hold of the rope, old son," directed Moir.

He did not approach as MacGregor resignedly led the way to the sledge. Tammy turned from his thawing-pan to hitch the Scotchman to his traces and to strap down his hands. Moir stood back, the gun in his hand, dominating all three.

"Now into tuh pit; Joey's got a load waiting," he commanded. "And one whine out of you, old ox, and you get the prod. Hi-yah! Giddap!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE SNOW BURNER WORKS FOR TWO

WITH MacGregor leading the way, Reivers humbly picked up his rope and helped drag the sledge into the mine. The tunnel, high and broad enough only for two men to crawl abreast, ran at a steep slant into the sand for probably twenty-five

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feet. At its end it spread into a small room in which Joey was at work, chopping loose chunks of frozen earth.

One glance around and Reivers knew from experience that this room had been the home of the pocket, and that, unless the signs lied, the pocket soon would be worked out. Judging by the extent of the excavation the pocket had been a good-sized one, and the amount of dust and nuggets taken from it undoubtedly would foot up to a neat sum. Yes, it would be a tidy fortune. It would be plenty to give him a new start in life, plenty to pay him for the trouble he had gone to, plenty even to pay him for the baseness of his present position.

He obeyed Joey meekly when ordered, with curses and insults, to load the sledge. He could have throttled Joey down there in the mine without a sound coming up to warn those above of what was happening, but Moir's conduct of the morning had made an impression upon Reivers. A man who kept himself out of reach, who kept his six-shooter pointed at you all the time, and who could shoot tin cups out of your moving hand, was not a man to be despised.

The first hour of work that day convinced Moir and his henchmen that their original unflattering estimate of Reivers was correct. Even a close observer, regarding him during that period of probation, would have seen nothing to indicate that he was anything but what Shanty Moir had judged him to be. A miserable, broken-down squaw-man, without a will of his own, and only one ambition—to clamor for as much liquor as possible—that was the character that Reivers played perfectly for the benefit of Moir and his two men.

At first, they kept an eye on him, watching to see if by any chance the old fool might be dangerous. They discovered that he would be dangerous if turned loose—to their supply of liquor. Beyond that he had, apparently, not a single aim in the world. His physical weakness, they soon discovered, was exactly what was to be expected of a whisky bloat. He was able to help haul the sledge-loads of frozen earth up the incline of the shaft, and that was all. Even that left him puffing and trembling.

"Is an old ox, as 'ee said, Shanty, with even tuh horns burnt off him by tuh hooch," said Joey, after the first few loads. "Keep a little o' tuh liquor running down his throat each day and he'll be a good draft beast to us. Nothing to fear o' him. Didst well when 'ee picked him out, chief."

They stopped watching him. He was harmless. Which was exactly the frame of mind which Reivers had worked to create.

MacGregor alone knew how cleverly Reivers was playing his part, and he regarded his new companion in misery with greater awe and swore beneath his breath in unholy admiration. He had excellent opportunity to appreciate Reivers's ability to play the part of a weakling, for the Snow Burner, when not observed, caught his free hand in MacGregor's traces and pulled the full weight of the heavy sledge as if it had been a boy's plaything.

"Eh, mon!" gasped the weakened Scotchman in relief. "I begin to comprehend now. 'Tis a surprise you're planning for Shanty Moir. Oh, aye! 'Tis a braw joke. But you maun l'ave me finish him, man; 'tis my right. And I thank you and will repay you well for the favor you are doing me in my present bunged-up condition."

"Favor your eye!" snapped Reivers. "It's easier to pull the whole thing than to have you dragging on it. Don't think I'm doing it for your sake. You'll have a rude awakening, my friend, if you're building any hopes on me."

"I dinna understand you," said MacGregor with a shake of his head. "You're different from any man I ever met. But at all events, you've made the loads lighter, and I think I must have perished soon had you not done so."

"Shut up!" hissed Reivers irritably. "I tell you I'm doing it because it's easier for me."

His attitude toward the old man was brutally domineering when they were alone and openly abusive when they were in the presence of Moir or the others. He showered foul epithets upon him, pretended to shoulder the greater part of the work on him, and abused him in a fashion that won the approval of the three brutes over them.

"Make him do his share, old sonny," roared Moir. "Wilt have tuh prod? Joey, give him tuh prod so he can poke up tuh jackass when he lags back."

"Don't need no prod," boasted Reivers. "I can handle him without any prod. Come on, pull up there, you loafer. Think I'm going to do it all?"

MacGregor on such occasions would hold his head low to hide the gleam in his eyes

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and the grin that strove for room on his tightly pressed lips. His harness was hanging slack; Reivers took more of the load upon himself with every curse that he uttered.

All through the day it was Reivers's strength that pulled the heavy sledge up the dirt incline of the tunnel, and at night, when the day's work was done, and MacGregor, tottering feebly toward his bunk, fell helpless through the dugout's flap, Reivers picked him up, laid him down gently and placed his own blanket beneath his head.

"God bless you, lad!" whispered MacGregor.

"Shut up!" hissed Reivers. "I don't want any talk like that."

He looked down at the prostrate man for a moment. Then with a muttered curse he unloosened the straps that bound MacGregor's arms to his sides and hurled himself over to his own side of the shack. He was very angry with himself. Pity and succor for the helpless had never before been a part of his creed. Why should he trouble about MacGregor?

"I'll have to strap you up again in the morning," he flung out suddenly, "but it won't hurt to have your hands free for the night. Shut up—lay still! I hear somebody coming."

CHAPTER XXII

"THE PENALTY OF A WHITE MAN'S MIND"

"OH, SNOW BURNER!" It was Tillie who came, bearing the evening food, and Reivers crept out on the sand to meet her. "Oh, Snow Burner," she whispered quietly, "I am weary of this camp. The air is bad, and the country is not open. It is in my heart to poison Iron Hair as soon as the Snow Burner says we are ready to go from this place."

Reivers stared at her. A short while ago he would not have been shocked in the slightest degree to have heard this—to her, natural speech—fall from Tillie's lips. But of late another woman, another kind of woman, had been in his thoughts, and Tillie's words left him speechless for the moment.

The squaw continued placidly—

"The Snow Burner comes here after gold?"

"Yes."

"And when he has the gold we go away?"

"Yes."

"Good. The pig, Iron Hair, wears a great belt of buckskin about his middle. The gold is in there, much of it. I will poison him tonight, and we will take the belt and go away from here in the morning."

Reivers made no reply. Here was success offered him without so much as a move of his hand. He need have no part in it, none at all. Tillie would bring him the gold belt. That was what he had come for; and hitherto he had never let anything in the world stand between him and the gratification of his desires. Yet he hesitated.

"Is there more gold here than Iron Hair wears in his belt?" asked Tillie.

Reivers shook his head.

"Then why wait?" Her whisper was full of amazement. "It is not like the Snow Burner. Was there ever a man who could make him do his will? And yet now the Snow Burner labors for Iron Hair like a woman."

"Like a woman?" He repeated her bold words in surprise, while she sat humbly awaiting the careless, back-hand blow which knocked her rolling on the sand. "And was that hand like the hand of a woman?" he asked.

Tillie picked herself up with a gleam of hope in her eyes. It was long since the Snow Burner had struck her strongly.

"Oh, Snow Burner!" she whispered proudly as she crawled back to his side. "Why do we wait? It is all ready. The Snow Burner knows where the gold is that he came for. Tillie will do her share. The sleep-medicine is sewed in the corner of my blanket. There is enough to kill this big pig, Iron Hair, and his men three times over. Will not the Snow Burner give the sign for Tillie to put the sleep-medicine in their food? Then they will sleep and not awaken, and the Snow Burner and Tillie can go away with the gold. Was it not so that the Snow Burner wished to do?"

Reivers nodded. That was what he wished.

It was very simple. Only a nod. After that—the sleep-medicine, the tasteless Indian poison, the secret of which Tillie possessed, and which she would have used on a hundred men had Reivers given the word.

Yes, it was very simple—except that he could not forget Hattie MacGregor. The

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memory of her each hour had grown clearer, more torturing. Because of it he had taken the killing load of work from her father's shoulders; because of it he was growing weak. He swore mutteringly as he thought of it. He had permitted her memory to soften him, to make a boy of him. But now he was himself again. Tillie's words had done their work. He turned toward the squaw, and she saw by the look in his eyes that the Snow Burner at last was going to give the fatal sign.

"Tonight," she pleaded. "Let it be tonight. It is a bad camp here. The air is not good. Iron Hair is a pig. Let me give the sleep-medicine tonight; then we go from here in the morning—together."

She crept closer to him, slyly smiling up at him; and suddenly Reivers flung her away with a movement of loathing and sprang up, tall and straight.

"No," he said quietly, "not tonight." And Tillie crouched at his feet.

"Snow Burner," she whispered, "I hear Iron Hair and his men talk. They go away soon. They take the gold with them. Does not the Snow Burner want the gold?"

Reivers looked down upon her. He was standing up, stiff and proud, as he should stand, but as he had not stood since he had begun to play at being a drunken squaw-man.

"I do not want you to help me get the gold," he said slowly. "I do not want you to give Iron Hair the sleep-medicine, tonight, or any night. I will take the gold from Iron Hair without your help. I have spoken."

He stood looking down at her, and Tillie, looking up at him, once more was reminded that he was a white man and that the vast gulf between them never might be bridged. Wearily, hopelessly she rose to her feet.

"The Snow Burner has spoken; I have heard," she whispered, and went humbly back into the large dugout.

Reivers laughed a small laugh of bitterness as he heard the flap drop behind her. He threw his head far back and gazed up at the slit of starlit sky that showed above the mouth of the cavern, and for once in his life he felt the common insignificance of humankind alone in the vast scheme of Nature. He was weak; he had thrown away the easy way to success; he had let the memory of Hattie MacGregor's face, flaring before his eyes in the instant that Tillie thrust her lips up to his, beat him.

He threw up his great arms and held them out, tense and hard as bars of living steel. He felt of his shoulders, his biceps, his chest, his legs, and he laughed sardonically.

"Body, you're just as superior to other men's bodies as you ever were," he mused. "Yes, Body, you're just as fit to rend and prey on others as ever. But you're handicapped now. You're not permitted to do things as you used to do them. Body, you're paying the penalty of being burdened with a white man's mind."

MACGREGOR looked up as Reivers reentered the dugout bearing the evening food. A tiny fire in one corner lighted up the room and by its flickering flames he saw Reivers' face.

"Blood o' God!" whispered the old man in awe. "What's come over you, man?"

He rose on his elbow and peered more closely.

"Man — man — you ha' not overcome Shanty Moir? You have not finished him without letting me——"

Reivers laughed.

"What are you talking about? Do I look as if I'd been fighting?"

MacGregor studied him seriously.

"I donno," said he slowly. "I donno that you look as if you had been fighting. But you come in with your head high up, and the look in your eyes of a man who has conquered. That I do know. Tell me, lad, what's taken place wi' you outside?"

"None of your business," snapped Reivers. "Here's your supper." And he returned to his side of the dugout to sit down to think.

He was on his mettle now. He had put to one side the easy, certain way to success that Tillie had offered. Success was not to be so easy as he had thought. Thus far it had been easy. He had met Moir, he had won his way into the mine, he had learned where the gold was hidden, all as he had planned. Remained to get the gold and get safely away. The time to do it in was short.

Reivers' experienced miner's eyes had told him that the pocket was perilously near to being mined out. Any day, any hour now, and the pay-streak which they were following might end in barren dirt. That would be the end of his opportunity.

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Moir and his men would waste no time in the Dead Lands after making their clean-up. They would pack and travel at once, southward, to the railroad. They would not permit even so harmless an individual as a sodden squaw-man to trail them. Hence, Reivers knew that he must find or make his opportunity without waste of time and strike the instant it was found or made.

He had been unable to find an opportunity that first day. Moir in his camp was a different man from Moir on the trail. He was the boss man here, and Reivers granted him ungrudged admiration for it. Liquor was his master on the trail; here he was master of it. His treatment of Joey and Tammy in the morning had explained his attitude on that question too clearly to make it worth while to attempt to entice him into a bout at drinking. Moir was boss here, boss of himself and others, and he always had his six-shooter handy to prove it.

Tammy and Joey wore knives at their hips, but no guns. Moir's 30.40 rifle hung carelessly on a nail near the door of his dug-out. This had puzzled Reivers at first. Would a bad man like Moir be so simple as to leave his rifle where any one might lay hands on it, and carry a six-shooter in a manner to provoke a gun-fight? When he was ordered to carry a pail of water to the dugout Reivers managed to take a careful look at the rifle, and the puzzle was explained. The breech-block had been taken out and the fine weapon was no more deadly than any club eight pounds in weight.

His respect for Moir had increased with this discovery. Evidently Moir was not so thick-headed after all. He took no chances. The only effective shooting-iron in camp was his six-shooter, and with this he was thoroughly master of the situation.

In the first hour Reivers had noticed that Moir had a system of guarding himself. It was the system of the primitive fighting man and it consisted solely of: let no man get at your back. At no time, whether in the mine, at the washing-pans, in the open, or in the dugout did Moir permit any one to get behind him. He made no distinction. In the pit he stood with Joey before him. At the pans he worked behind Tammy. When the others grouped together he whirled as smoothly as a lynx if any one made to pass in his rear. Even when he sat at ease in the dugout with Tillie he placed his back against the bare stone wall at the rear of the room. So much Reivers had seen during his first day in the camp.

"Does he sleep soundly at night?" he asked suddenly.

"Who?" asked MacGregor.

"Moir, of course."

"Soundly?" The Scotchman gritted his teeth. "Aye, as soundly as a lynx lying down by its kill in a wolf country."

Reivers smiled a grim smile. There was no chance, then, of rushing Shanty Moir in his sleep. It would be harder to get the gold and get away than he had expected. In fact, the difficulties of it presented quite a problem. He liked problems, did the Snow Burner, and his smile grew more grim as he rolled himself in his blankets and lay down to wait, dream-tortured by pictures of Hattie MacGregor, for the coming of daylight of the day in which he had resolved to force the problem to solution.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MADNESS OF "HELL-CAMP" REIVERS

THE day opened as the day before had opened. A bellow from Shanty Moir, and Reivers strapped MacGregor into his harness again and they tumbled out to their rude morning meal. Again Moir stood a distance away, the big six-shooter balanced easily in his hand. But this morning Joey and Tammy, over by the pit-mouth, also were awaiting the appearance of their two beasts of burden, and Reivers instantly sensed something new and sinister afoot. At the sight of MacGregor's decrepitude, as, stiff and tottering, he made his way to his meal, Joey and Tammy strove vainly to conceal the wolfish grins that appeared on their ugly faces.

"Aye, Shanty, art quite right. Is worth his keep no longer," said Tammy. "Hast been a fair animal for a Scotch jackass, but does not thrive on his oats no more."

"One fair day's work left in him," said Joey, appraising MacGregor shrewdly. "Will knock off a little early, eh, Shanty, so's to have tuh light to see him swim."

"Would not miss tuh sight of that for a pound of dust," replied Shanty, and the three roared fiendishly together.

"You poor, misbegotten spawn," said MacGregor, quietly beginning to eat, eying them one after the other. "I'll live to spit

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on the shamed corpses of the lot of you."

As the day's work began, Reivers started to calculate each move that he and Moir made with a view to discovering the opportunity he was looking for. All that he wished was a chance to rush Shanty without giving the latter an opportunity to use his gun.

The odds of three to one against him, and Joey and Tammy armed with knives, he accepted as a matter of course. But a six-shooter in the hands of a man who could use one as Shanty Moir could was a shade too much even for him to venture against. The manner in which Moir had shot up the tin cup the morning before proved how alert and sure was his trigger-finger. To make the suspicion of a move toward him, with the gun in his hand, would have spelled instant ruin.

As he watched now, Reivers saw that Moir was more vigilant than ever. He kept far away from the pit-mouth. The gun either was in his hand or hanging ready in the holster. And when Reivers saw the first load of sand he understood why.

The pay-streak had paid out. They were winnowing the drippings of dust washed down from the pocket now, and this job soon would be done. Moir was not taking any chances of losing at this stage of affairs. The fortune was in his grasp; he would break camp and be off in the same hour that the sand began to run low-grade.

He took no part in the work today. He merely stood and watched. And Reivers watched back, and the hours passed, and the short day began to draw to a close, and still not the slightest chance to rush Shanty Moir and live had presented itself.

As the early twilight began to creep down into the cavern, the ugly grins with which Joey and Tammy regarded MacGregor began to increase. Suddenly Tammy, washing a pan of sand in the brook, threw up both hands.

"Not a trace in the last load, Shanty!" he shouted.

"All out!" came Moir's bellow, as if he had been waiting for the signal.

Joey and Tammy threw down their tools and came over and stood behind Reivers and MacGregor who came up dragging a loaded sledge behind them.

"Take that load down yonder," ordered Moir, pointing to the black tunnel into which the creek disappeared in leaving the cavern.

Tammy and Joey followed, grinning, two paces behind the sledge. Moir, gun in hand, walked ten feet behind them.

"Whoa!" he laughed when Reivers and MacGregor had drawn up against the cliff beside the stream's exit. "You can unhitch tuh old jackass now, ma sons. Then over with it quick."

With a yelp Tammy and Joey tore loose MacGregor's traces. They held him between them, and in his bound and weakened condition he was unable to struggle or turn around.

Before Reivers could move they had hurled MacGregor into the deep water in the tunnel. He sank like a stone and the current sucked him in.

"Good-by, MacGregor of the big boasts!" laughed Moir, but he laughed a trifle too soon.

In the instant that the current bore MacGregor into the darkness of the tunnel his face bobbed up above the waters. He looked up, and looked straight into Reivers's eyes. It was not a look of appeal; it was the same look that had been in the eyes of Hattie MacGregor the day when Reivers had left her cabin.

Then Hell-Camp Reivers felt himself going mad. He hit Tammy so hard and true that he flew through the air and struck against Moir. The next instant Reivers was diving like a flash into the black water, groping for MacGregor, while the current swept him into the total darkness.

He heard the bullet from Moir's revolver strike the water behind him in the instant that his hands found MacGregor; heard mocking laughter as he pulled the old man's head above water; then the current whirled him and his burden away. It whisked him down-stream with a power irresistible. It threw him from side to side against the ragged rock walls. It sucked him and the load he bore down in deep whirlpools and spewed them up again.

He bumped his head against the stone roof of the tunnel and swore. The roof was a scant foot above the water. He put his hand up. The roof was getting closer to the water with every yard. Soon there was only room for their upturned faces above the water.

Reivers laughed heartily. So this was to be the end! The joke was on him. After

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all he had gone through, he was to drown like a silly fool through a fool's impulse.

Presently roof and water came together. For a moment Reivers fought with his vast strength, holding his own for an instant against the current, hanging on to the last few seconds of life with a fury of effort. The current proved too strong. It sucked them under; the water closed above them. They were whirled and buffeted to the last breath of life in them, and then suddenly their heads slipped above water and they were looking straight up at the gray Winter sky.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SURPRISE FOR SHANTY MOIR

REIVERS caught hold of a spear of rock the instant his head came out of water, and held on. He did not try to think or understand at first. Sufficient to know that he was alive and to pump his lungs full of the air they were crying for. He held MacGregor under his left arm, and he rather wondered that he hadn't let him go in that moment when he went under. MacGregor was beginning to revive, too. Reivers looked around.

There was not much to see. They were in a tiny opening in the rocks, a yard or two in length. It was a duplicate of Moir's cavern on a miniature scale, except that here the rock walls were not high or impossible to climb. For this space the brook showed itself once more to the sun, then vanished again under the cliffs.

"Is it Heaven?" gasped MacGregor, only half conscious.

"Nearer hell," laughed Reivers.

He lifted himself and his burden out of the water to a resting-place on a shelf of rock. For a minute or two he sat looking up at the rock walls and the gray sky above them. He looked down at the water, at the spot where they had been spewed from death back into life. And then he leaped upright and laughed, laughed so that the rocks rang with it, laughed so that MacGregor's senses cleared and he looked at his savior in consternation. His laughter was the uncontrollable, heart-free laughter of the man who suddenly sees a great joke upon his enemy.

He smote MacGregor between the shoulder-blades so he gasped and coughed. He tore the straps and harness from his arms, body and legs, tossed him up in the air, shook him and set him down on the rock.

"I've got him!" he said at last. "Oh, Shanty Moir, what a surprise you have coming to your own black self!"

MacGregor, with his senses cleared enough to realize that he was alive, and to remember how the miracle had come about, said quietly—

"Man, that was the bravest thing I ever saw a man do."

"What?"

"Diving into that hole after me."

"Oh, to —— with that! That's past. The past doesn't count—not when the very immediate future is so full of juice and interest as happens to be the case just now. I've got Shanty Moir, old-timer. Do you understand? He's mine and all that he's got is mine, and he's going to be surprised. Oh, how surprised he's going to be!"

MacGregor looked down at the two yards of rushing water, up at the rock walls and then at the jubilant Reivers.

"I dinna see it," he said dryly.

"Really?" Reivers suddenly became interested in him as if he presented a rare mental problem. "Can't you make that simple mind of yours work out the simple solution of this problem?"

MacGregor shook his head.

"What I see is this: we're alive, and that only for the present. We're in a little hole in the Dead Lands. Happen we climb out of the hole, we have no dogs, food, or weapons. The nearest camp is two good days' mushing, with good fresh dogs. Too far. If I could manage to stagger five miles I'd surprise myself. There is not so much as a dry match on us. No, I maun say, lad, my simple mind does not see the solution of the problem."

"Try again, Mac," urged Reivers. "Make your mind work. What do we need to make our condition blessed among men; what do men need to be well-fitted on the Winter trail? You can make your mind do that sum, can't you?"

"We need," replied MacGregor doggedly, "dogs, and food, and fire, and weapons."

"Correct. And now what's the next thought that your gray matter produces after that masterpiece?"

"That the nearest place where we may obtain these things is too far away for us to make, unless happen we meet some one on the trail, which is not likely."

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"Pessimism!" laughed Reivers. "Too much caution stunts the possibility of the mind. Interesting demonstration of the fact, with your mind as an example." He turned and smote with the flat of his hand the stone wall from under which they had just emerged. "What's the other side of those rocks, Mac?"

"Shanty Moir and his six-shooter."

"And dogs, and food, and matches, and cartridges, and gold, everything, everything to make us kings of the country, Mac! And they're ours—ours as surely as if we had 'em in our hands now."

"I dinna see it," said MacGregor.

"Pessimism again. How can Moir and his gang get out of their camp?"

"Up-stream, by the creek, of course."

"Any other way?"

"There's the way we came—but they do not know that."

"Correct, and when we've plugged up that single exit they can't get away from us, Mac, and then we've got 'em!"

MacGregor's eyes lighted up, then he grew dour again.

"We have got 'em, if we plug up the river, I see," he admitted, "but when we have got them, what good does it do us? What are you going to do, then?"

"That's the surprise, Mac; I won't tell even you." He looked swiftly for a way up the rock walls and found one. "The first question is: Do you think you can climb after me up that crevice there?"

"I could climb through hell and back again if it would help in getting Shanty Moir."

"All right. I can't quite give you hell, but I'll give Shanty Moir an imitation of it before he's much older. Come on. We've got some work to do before it gets dark."

HE LED the way into the crevice he had marked for the climb up from the hole and boosted MacGregor up before him. It was slow, hard work, for MacGregor's weak hold slipped often, and he came slipping down upon Reivers' shoulders. In the end Reivers impatiently pulled him down, took him on his back and crawled up, and with a laugh rolled himself and his burden in the snow on top of the cliffs. A few rods away smoke was rising through the opening above Moir's camp, and at the sight of it MacGregor's numbed faculties came to life.

"Lemme go, man!" he pleaded as Reivers caught him as he staggered toward the opening. "It's my chance, man. I can kill the cur with a rock from up here."

"Save your strength; I've got use for it," said Reivers. "Can you walk? All right. Come on, then, and don't try to get near that gap."

Taking MacGregor by the hand he led the way carefully around the big opening till they came to the opposite side of the mass of rocks, where the creek entered the tunnel by which Moir reached his camp. Crawling and slipping, they made their way down until they stood beside the bed of the stream.

"Now to work, Mac," said Reivers, and seizing a rock bore it to the tunnel's mouth and dropped it into the water.

"Aye, aye!" chuckled MacGregor, as he understood the significance of this move. "We'll wall the curs in."

For half an hour they labored. Reivers carried and rolled the heaviest rocks he could move into position across the tunnel, and MacGregor staggered beneath smaller pieces to fill up the chinks. When their work was finished there was a rock wall across the mouth of the tunnel which it would have been almost impossible to tear down, especially from the inside.

It was growing dark when the task was completed, and Reivers nodded in great satisfaction.

"That'll hold 'em long enough for my purpose, and we just made it in time," he said. "Now come on up the mountain again, and then for the surprise."

"The surprise, man?" panted MacGregor as he toiled up the rocks. "What are you going to do? Tell me what's in your head?"

"Hush, hush!" laughed Reivers, pulling him up to the top. "Your position is that of the onlooker. It would spoil it for you if you knew what was going to happen."

"An onlooker—me—when it's a case of getting Shanty Moir? Don't say that, lad. Don't leave me out. He's mine. You know that by all the rights of men and gods it's my right to get him. Give me my just share of revenge."

"Shut up!"

They were nearing the brink of the opening. Reivers' hand covered MacGregor's mouth as they leaned over and looked down upon the unsuspecting men in the cavern below.

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In the shut-in spot night had fallen. On the sand before the dugout Tillie was cooking over a brisk fire, going about her work as calmly as if nothing of moment had happened during the afternoon. Near by, Moir and Joey were packing the dog-sledge and repairing harness, evidently preparing to take the trail after the evening meal. Tammy sat by the fire, holding together with both hands the pieces of his nose which Reivers' blow had smashed flat on his face.

Reivers scarcely looked at the men, but began to scan the walls for a way to get down. The walls slanted inwardly from the top, and at first it seemed impossible that a man could get safely into the cavern without the aid of a rope. But presently Reivers saw that for thirty feet directly above the large dugout the rocks were ragged enough to afford plenty of holds for hands and feet.

The walls were nearly fifty feet high. If he could reach to the bottom of this rough space he would be hanging with his feet, ten or twelve feet above the cavern floor.

"Good enough," he said aloud. "It's a cinch."

"A cinch it is," breathed MacGregor softly. "We'll roll up a pile of rocks and kill 'em like rats in a pit. But you maun leave Shanty to me, lad, I——"

"Shut up!" Reivers thrust the Scotchman back from the brink. "Do you want me to go after the harness for you? I told you that your job was to be the onlooker. I settle this thing with Shanty Moir myself."

"But man——"

"Moir kicked me. Do you understand? He placed his dirty foot on me. Do you see why I'm going to do it by myself?"

"Placed his foot on you? God's blood! What has he done to me—robbed me, made an animal of me, stabbed me with a prod! Who has the better right to his foul life?"

"It isn't a case of right, but of might, Mac," chuckled Reivers. "I've got the better might. Therefore, will you give me your word that you'll refrain from interfering with my actions until I've paid my debt to Mr. Moir, or must I go back after the harness and strap you up?"

"Cruel——"

"Promise!"

"I promise," said MacGregor. "But it's wrong, sore wrong. I protest."

"All right. Protest all you want to, but do it silently. Not another word or sound out of you now until the job's done."

Together they crawled back to the brink above the large dugout and peered down into the darkening cavern. In a flash Reivers had his mackinaw and boots off. The cooking-fire was deserted. No one was in sight. Moir and his men and Tillie were at supper in the dugout, and Reivers's chance had come. He swung himself silently over the brink and hung by a handhold on the rock.

"Don't interfere, Mac," he said warningly. "Not till I've paid Shanty Moir for the touch of his foot."

CHAPTER XXV

A FIGHT THAT WAS A FIGHT

WITH a twist of his body he threw his stockinged feet forward and caught toe-holds on the rough surface of the wall. Next he released his right hand and fumbled downward till he found a solid piece of protruding rock. Having tested it thoroughly he let go his holds with both feet and left hand and dropped his full weight into the grip of his right. Above him, MacGregor, with his face glued to the brink of the opening, gasped twice, once because he was sure Reivers was dropping straight to the bottom, and again when his right hand took the shock of his full weight without loosening its grip.

Reivers heard and looked up and smiled. Then he swung his feet inward again, secured another hold, lowered his right hand to another sure grip, and so made his startling way down the inwardly slanting cliff.

At the third desperate drop MacGregor drew back, unable to stand the strain of watching. Had Reivers been able to see on top of the cliff he would have laughed, for the Scotchman was down on his knees in the snow, earnestly praying.

Finally MacGregor summoned up courage to peer down once more. Then he knew his prayers had been answered. Reivers was hanging easily by his hands, directly above the front of the large dugout, and his feet were less than ten feet above the bottom of the cave. MacGregor gave a whoop of thanksgiving and gathered to him an armful of stones.

For a moment Reivers hung there, looking down and appraising the situation. He

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loosened his hold until his whole weight hung on the ends of his fingers.

"Come out and fight, Shanty!" he bellowed suddenly. "Come out, you cheap cur, and fight like a man!"

Nothing loath Moir came, responding like a wild animal on the instant of the weird challenge from above. Like a wild man he came, six-shooter in hand, tearing the front of the dugout away in his rush, and Reivers dropped and struck him neatly the instant he appeared.

It was a carefully aimed drop. Landing on Moir's neck, Reivers would have killed him. He had no wish to kill him—yet. He landed on Moir's shoulders and the six-shooter went flying away as the two bodies crashed together and dropped on the sand with a thud.

Reivers was up first. It was well that he was. Tammy and Joey were only a step behind Moir. Like wildcats they clawed at Reivers and like wildcats they rolled on the ground when his fists met them. Then Moir was up on his feet. His senses were a little dull, but he saw enough of the situation to satisfy him. Before him was something to fight, to rush, to annihilate. And he rushed.

Up on the cliff the maddened MacGregor yelped joyously, a stone in each hand, as Reivers leaped forward to meet the rush and struck. Shanty Moir had expected a grapple, and Reivers' fist caught him full in the mouth and threw him back on his shoulders a man's length away.

When Moir arose then, the lower part of his face had the appearance of crushed meat, but he growled through the blood and rushed again. Reivers struck, and Moir's nose disappeared in a welter of blood and gristle. He struck again, but Moir came on and locked him in his huge arms.

Joey and Tammy were up now. Their knives were out. They saw their chance and leaped forward to strike at Reivers' back. With his life depending upon it, the Snow Burner swung Moir's great body around, and Joey and Tammy stayed their hands barely in time to save plunging their knives into the back of their chief.

Growling a wild curse, MacGregor dropped two stones the size of his head. One struck Joey on the shoulder and sent him shrieking with pain into the dugout; the other dropped at Reivers' feet. With a yell he hurled Moir from him and snatched up the stone. Joey, reading his doom in the Snow Burner's eyes, backed away into the brink of the brook. The heavy stone caught him in the chest. Then he struck the water with a splash and was gone.

But Moir was up in the same instant and his arms licked around from behind and raised Reivers off his feet. The hold was broken as suddenly as it was clamped on. They were face to face again, and face to face they fought, trampling the sand and the fire indiscriminately. Each blow from Reivers now splashed blood from Moir's face as from a soaked sponge, and at each blow MacGregor shouted wildly:

"That for the kick you gave him, Shanty! That for the dirt you did me!"

The dogs, mad with terror, fled up the brook, met the stone wall and came whining back. They cowered, jammering in fright at the terrible combat which raged, minute after minute, before them.

Out of the dugout softly came stealing Tillie. A knife, dropped by Joey or Tammy, gleamed in the light of the fire. She picked it up. With a smile of great contentment on her face she crept noiselessly toward the struggling men. They were locked in a clinch now, and with the smile widening she moved around behind Moir's broad back. The knife flashed above her head. Reivers saw it. With an effort he wrenched an arm free and knocked the knife away.

"Keep away!" he roared, springing out of the clinch. "This is between Iron Hair and me."

Up on the cliff MacGregor groaned. In freeing himself Reivers had hurled Moir to one side, and Moir had dropped with his outstretched hands nearly touching his six-shooter, where it had fallen when Reivers had dropped upon him. Like the stab of a snake his hand reached out and snapped it up.

"Your soul to the devil, Shanty Moir!" shrieked MacGregor and hurled another stone.

His aim was true this time. The stone struck Moir squarely on his big head and drove his face into the sand. He never moved after it.

REIVERS looked up. On the brink of the cliff MacGregor on his knees was chanting his war-cry, his thanks that vengeance had not been denied him. Reivers smiled.

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"That's a good song, Mac, whatever it is!" he laughed, when the maddened Scotchman had grown quieter. "But the fact remains that you disobeyed my orders and interfered.

"Aye! I interfered. I hurled a stone and sent the black soul of Shanty Moir back to his brother the devil!" chanted MacGregor. "But, lad, I did not interfere until you'd paid him in full—until you'd paid double—for the kick he gave you. Three of them there were, and they were armed and you with bare fists! God's blood! Never since men stood up with fist to fist has there been such fighting. One disabled, and two men dead! Dead you are, you poor pups! And I can tell by the way you lived where you're roasting now.

"Ah, ah! I ha' seen a man fight; I ha' seen what I shall never forget, and, poor stick that I am compared to him, I ha' e'en had a hand in it myself. Man, man! Would you grudge me a little bite after your belly's full of battle?"

Reivers spoke quietly and coldly.

"Go down and tear out as much of the stone wall as you can. I'll take the heavy stones from this side." He turned to Tillie. "Take the big belt from Iron Hair and give it to me. Then make all ready for the trail. We march tonight."

And Tillie, as she harnessed the dogs, spat upon Iron Hair, the beaten.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SNOW BURNER PAYS

"AND NOW the Snow Burner has his gold. He has robbed the great Iron Hair in his own camp. Great is the Snow Burner! Now he has the gold which he longed for. Now he is rich. The white men will bow down to him. Great is the Snow Burner!"

Tillie crouched beside Reivers as, an hour later, he stood on the edge of the Dead Lands, and triumphantly crooned the saga of his success. The gold belt of Shanty Moir hung heavily over his shoulder, its great weight constantly reminding him of the fortune that it contained. The dogs were held in leash, eager to be quit of the harsh rock-chasms through which they had just traveled, and to strike their lope on a trail over the open country beyond.

MacGregor sat wearily on one side of the sledge. The exertions and excitement of the afternoon had exhausted him in his weakened condition. He sat slumped together, only half conscious of what was going on. In a moment he would be sound asleep.

And Reivers had the gold. He had succeeded. He had the gold, and he had a supply of food and a strong, fresh team of dogs eager for the trail. All that was necessary was to turn the dogs toward the south. Two, three, four days' traveling and he would strike the railroad. And the railroad ran to tide-water, and on the water steamboats would carry him away to the world he had planned to return to.

It was very simple, as simple as had been Tillie's scheme for getting rid of Moir. But he couldn't do it. He didn't want to do it. He wanted to do just one thing now, above all others, and that was what he set out to do.

He stooped down and strapped the belt of gold around MacGregor's middle. MacGregor was sound asleep now, so he placed him on the sledge and bound him carefully in place. Tillie's chant died down in astonishment.

"We take the old one with us?" she asked.

"We do," said Reivers. "Hiyah! Together there! Mush, mush up!"

To Tillie's joy he turned the dogs to the northwest, in the direction of the camp of her people. The Snow Burner was lost to her; she knew that, when he had refused her help with Shanty Moir; but it was something to have him come back to the camp.

Reivers, driving hard and straight all night, brought his team up the river-bed to Tillie's camp in the morning. MacGregor was out of his head by then, and for the day they stopped to rest and feed. Reivers sat in the big tepee alone with MacGregor and fed him soft food which the old squaws had prepared. In the evening he again tied the old man and the belt of gold to the sledge and hitched up the dogs. Tillie had read her doom in his eyes, but nevertheless she came out to the sledge prepared to follow.

"You do not come any farther," said Reivers as he picked up the dog-whip.

Tillie nodded.

"I know. With gold the Snow Burner can be a great man among the white women. Will the Snow Burner come back—some time?"

"I will never come back."

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"Ah-hh-hh!" Tillie's breath came fiercely. "So there is one white woman, then. If I had known——"

But Reivers was whipping and cursing the dogs and hurrying out of hearing.

MACGREGOR, clear-headed from the rest and food, but still weak, lifted his head and looked around as the sledge sped over the frozen snow.

"A new trail to me, lad," he said. "Where to, now?"

"On a fool's trail," laughed Reivers bitterly, and drove on.

Next morning MacGregor recognized the land ahead.

"Straight for Dumont's Camp we're heading, lad," he said. "Is it there we go?"

"Yes."

They came to Dumont's Camp as night fell. Reivers halted and made sundry inquiries.

"In a shack half ways between here and Fifty Mile," was the substance of the replies.

"Hi-yah! Mush, mush up!" and they were on the trail again.

At daylight the next day, from a rise in the land, he saw the shack that had been designated. Smoke was rising from the chimney, and a small figure that he knew even at that distance came out, filled a pail with snow and went in again.

Reivers stopped his dogs some distance from the shack. He threw MacGregor, gold belt and all, over his shoulder and went up to the door and knocked. For a second or two he smiled triumphantly as Hattie MacGregor opened the door and stood speechless at what she saw. Then he bowed low, laid his burden on the floor and went out without a word.

The dogs shuddered as they heard him laugh coming back to them.

"Hi-yah, mush!"

He drove them furiously into a gully that shut out the sight of the shack and sat down on the sledge. The dogs whined. It was the time for the morning meal and the master was making no preparations to eat.

"Still, you curs!" The whip fell mercilessly among them and they crouched in terror.

The time went by. The sun began to climb upward in the sky. Still the man sat on the sledge, making no preparations for the morning meal. The memory of the whip-cuts died in the dogs' minds under the growing clamor of hunger. They began to whine again.

"Still!" The master was on his feet, but the whip had fallen from his hand.

Down at the end of the gully a small figure was coming over the snow. She was running, and her red hair flowed back over her shoulders, and she laughed aloud as she came up to him. The pain was gone from Hattie MacGregor's lips, and her whole face beamed with a complete, unreasoning happiness, but the pride of her breed shone in her eyes even unto the end.

"Well, well!" sneered Reivers. "Aren't you afraid to come so near anything that pollutes the air?"

She laughed again. She did not speak. She only looked at him and smiled, and by the Eve-wisdom in the smile he knew that his secret was hers. He felt himself weakening, but the Snow Burner died hard. He tried to laugh his old, cold laugh, but the ice had been thawed in it.

"What do you want?" he sneered. "I'm not a good enough man for you. Why did you come out here?"

"Because I knew you would not go away again," she said, "and because now I know you are a good enough man for me."

"You red-haired trull!" He raised his hand to strike her.

She did not flinch; she merely smiled up at him confidently, contentedly. Suddenly she caught his clenched fist in her hands and kissed it. With a curse Reivers swung around on his dogs.

"Hi-yah! Mush, mush out of here!"

Out of the gully into the open he kicked and drove them. He did not look back. He knew that she was following.

She followed patiently. She knew that there was nothing else for her to do. She had known it the first day she had looked into his eyes. He was her man, and she must follow him.

So she trudged on behind her man as he forced the tired dogs to move. She smiled as she walked, and the widsom of Eve was in her smile. She had reason to smile, for the Snow Burner was driving straight toward the little shack.

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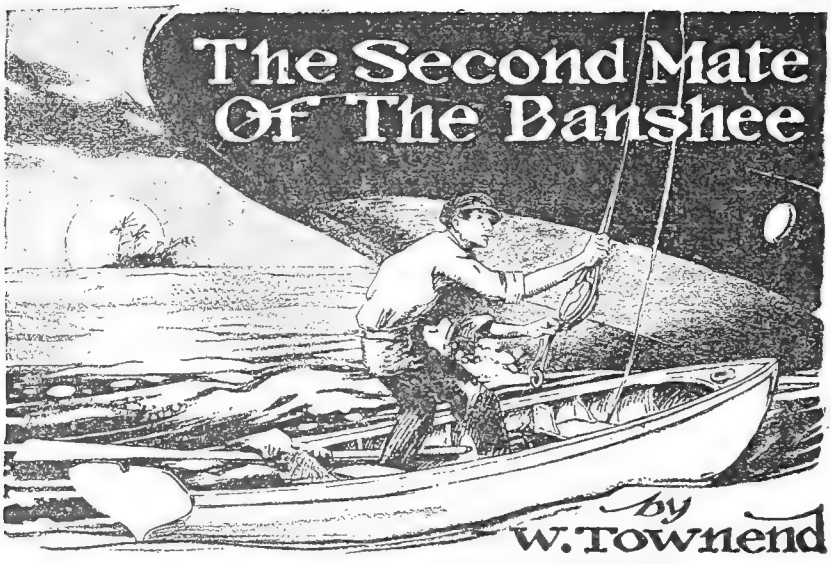

Author of "Private Harris," "A-Roving," "Irish," "Oil at San Nicolas," etc.

"MUST have been a bit of a shock to you," I said. "Wasn't it?"

Mr. Harrington looked at me sideways thoughtfully.

"A shock! I suppose it was, though I never think of it that way. Not so much shock as surprise. There's a diff'rence if you care to study it out. But what you were sayin' just now about the pawn-shop an' the man who pawned what wasn't his put me in mind of what happened to me once, an' that, takin' things all in all, was the biggest surprise I ever had in my life. Would you like to hear it? It's early yet, an'——"

He raised his eyebrows.

"You would! All right, then. I'll tell it. But I warn you, son, you may listen, but you won't believe. I've not told this more than three times—I gave it up, not wishin' to be called a liar without cause. Yet the story's true—as true as Gospel!

"It starts on Bute Street, Cardiff, down near the docks, an' it goes to Naples, Sulina, Port Said, Hong-Kong, Nagasaki an' Newcastle, New South Wales, till it reaches Batavia, or thereabouts, an' finally it ends in a small back-room in Liverpool. An' that's the cause of it, hangin' there over the bureau—the little copper ship!"

And Mr. Harrington nodded toward the small tablet of polished oak, on which was a sheet of thin copper embossed with the representation of a tramp steamer, broadside on.

"That!" I said. "How?"

"Ever examined it careful?" he asked. Rising to his feet he unhooked the tablet and gave it into my hands. "Read out what it says."

And I obeyed, somewhat bewildered.

"S. S. *Arabella*, sunk in collision in the English Channel with the loss of the captain and first officer, who went down gallantly with their ship."

"Yes," said Mr. Harrington cutting me short, "that's it, with the date, an' the initials of the man who made it. Briggs his name was, carpenter on the *Arabella*, my first voyage."

"Was he with you when you were wrecked?"

Mr. Harrington laughed a trifle scornfully.

"Was he? Would he have put that inscription on if he had? Of course not! No, I met him about a year after—he'd a shore job then—an' he showed me the ship an' I bought it. Good work, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, "it is."

"Ought to be screwed into the wall," said Mr. Harrington, "but I'm too lazy. Also a nail does as well, an' it's easier to take down in a hurry. I fixed it on firm once with four screws; some one unfixed it, an' that's why it's here in my berth on the *Umballa*. You

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don't understand that about takin' it down in a hurry, do you? Well, listen, an' you'll hear:

IT'S FUNNY how one thing leads to another, isn't it? If it hadn't been for me droppin' my watch down through the engine-room gratin's on to the platform aboard the *Narcissus* an' breakin' it beyond all hope of repair, I wouldn't be tellin' you this. But that's how I came to be lookin' into a pawnbroker's window on Bute Street, Cardiff, one afternoon soon after the *Narcissus* got into port from the Mediterranean.

By rights, o' course, I should ha' gone uptown to Queen Street or Duke Street, to one of them big jewelers, but I didn't. What's the good? If you keep your eyes open an' look around, like as not you can pick something up cheap an' save money. 'Sides a watch is a watch even if some one else has owned it. It's as good for tellin' the time by, isn't it?

An' so one afternoon I left the *Narcissus* an' walked up Bute Street in search of a watch. I may say now that I never found one, not that day at least. But I found something else, something I never expected to find in this world or the next, something I shouldn't have set eyes on.

It was the third or fourth place I'd stopped at, an' I was wonderin' whether to step in an' buy without any more fuss or not, when all of a sudden my heart seemed to stop beatin' an' the blood in my veins ran cold as ice an' I could scarcely breathe. An' why? There, right in front of me, between a small ivory image of Gautama, cross-legged in a boat, an' an old-fashioned flintlock pistol, was that little copper ship, the *Arabella*. The very same, in a pawnbroker's window on Bute Street, Cardiff.

For a while I didn't move. I just stood an' stared, with my brain whirlin' 'round an' 'round, not able to think, or anything. For why? I'll explain in a minute.

I'd made a mistake, o' course—it was one exactly sim'lar, but not the same. It couldn't be.

I opened the door of the shop an' went in. A little man with a big nose an' a gray beard smiles at me over the counter, rubbin' his hands like a Sheeney all the world over.

"Good afternoon," says he, "an' what can I do for you?"

"Good afternoon," says I very polite. "I'm not buyin'," I says, just to be plain for once, "but I saw a piece of wood in the window with a copper ship on it that's the livin' spit of one that I have at home. Might I have a glance at it?"

Might I? Might I look at any mortal thing in the shop I wanted to? Why, of course. He came 'round the counter an' undid the back of the window.

"The ship," said he, "certainly."

An' a moment later I was turnin' it 'round an' 'round in my hands, starin' stupidlike at my own initials scratched on the back—see, son; look at them—T. H. to T. C., an' I knew then that it was mine, the one I had owned an' given to Tommy Clarkson of the *Banshee*, an' which ought to be at the bottom of Flores Sea, in Lord only knows how many fathoms deep. An' yet there it was in that pawnbroker's!

An' then I saw the little man lookin' at me with his head on one side like a sparrow.

"Well," says he, "what 'ull you give for it?"

"Me!" I says. "I'm not buyin', I told you, didn't I?"

"Did you?" he says. "I'll let you have it for two pounds."

I bought it for twenty-five shillings, which was about twenty more than he'd given himself.

"You were on board the *Arabella* yourself, weren't you?" he says. "I knew some one who'd sailed on the ship would come in an' buy it. I knew all along." Pleased he was, an' he'd reason to be, too.

An' so the little copper *Arabella* was mine once more, after I'd never thought to see it again. But why wasn't it sunk with the ship? The *Banshee* had gone down with all hands twelve months before an' yet there was the oak tablet with the copper plate which I'd screwed into the wall of Tommy Clarkson's room the very day that they left.

When a steel ship sinks in a typhoon there's maybe a few odds an' ends that 'ull float. That stands to reason, don't it? But whatever it is that floats, it's not goin' to be a piece of oak that's been fixed on to the wall of the second mate's room, with a screw-driver an' four screws. Is it?

Well, then, what happened? That's what I couldn't tell. But I knew this—some one had unscrewed it an' taken it off the ship. Which again is not done if the ship's sinkin' an' it's all hands to the boats.

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What's more, knowin' Tommy Clarkson over an' above well, I was certain he'd not taken it off himself. Why should he? An' why the pawnbroker's in Cardiff when the *Banshee* had left Penarth, bound for Port Said an' the China Coast?

"Mister," says I, leanin' over the counter, "will you do me a favor?"

Says the pawnbroker, "What is it?"

"Where did you get this?" I says.

"What d'you want to know for?" says he kind of suspicious.

"No harm to you," I says, "but I must find out who sold it or pawned it, an' when."

"Must!" says he.

"Yes," says I very quiet. "Come, now," I says, "what's the use of beatin' around? I'll know sooner or later. Why not now? You wouldn't like me to get angry," I says, "an' hurt some one, would you?"

He looks scared.

"Meanin' me?" he says. "None of that, or I'll call the police."

"Right," says I, "an' welcome—but before they're here, an' one man wouldn't be no good, I'd have this place of yours wrecked; I'd have pretty well killed you an' the boy, an' you'd get such a name on the dock-side you'd be sorry you ever was born.

"Which 'ull it be?" I says. "Trouble, or just a few civil questions answered? An' now, how did you get that little copper ship?"

Son, there's nothin' to equal tact in settlin' an argument—nothin' at all.

He told me all right. He had to. He'd bought it a matter of two weeks previous.

"It wasn't pawned then?" I says.

"No," says he, "or it wouldn't have been in the window."

"Who sold it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Sellin's diff'rent from pawnin'," he says. "I've no record."

"Can't you remember what he was like?" I says.

"Remember!" says he. "It's not likely I'll forget. He was drunk an'—" here he gives me a scowl—"nasty an' inclined to make trouble. He'd red hair, an' a squint, one eye looked one way an' the other the other, an' on his right hand the little finger was missin'."

"Do you know what he was?" says I.

"Sailor or fireman," says he, "an' he told me he'd sailed on the *Arabella* himself."

"I'm much obliged," says I very polite. "An' when next I'm passin' I'll drop in an' ask if you've seen him again."

An' with that I walked out of the shop.

Well, son, the rest was simple. All I need do was to find the man with the red hair an' the squint an' the missin' finger—a fireman or a deck-hand on a tramp, prob'ly, an' by this time half-way to the Mediterranean or South America. Nothin' easier than to lay hands on him, of course.

Also, to help things along, the *Narcissus* was due to leave port in less than a week. Easy! It was pretty nigh hopeless. Or I thought so, then. But nothin's hopeless really—not if you have any luck.

An' as it turned out, I had all the luck that was goin'. In two days I learned what I wanted to know.

It come about through meetin' a friend I'd not seen for a year or more—Charley Williams, who'd been chief engineer on the *Mysore*—just back from Calcutta, an' glad to be home. He'd another man with him, stout little chap called Bradley, mate of one of the Blue Circle boats, outward bound the next mornin'. We'd a few drinks together, the three of us, an' then I says kind of casual—

"Either of you two ever met a deck-hand or fireman with red hair an' a squint an' a finger missin' from his right hand?"

"No," says Williams, "I've not."

"I have, though," says Bradley rather surprised. "From the description, that's a deck-hand who once sailed with me—Martin his name is—one of the biggest toughs that ever left Tiger Bay with his half-month's advance gone in beer. Red Martin he's known as," he says, "because of his hair. A bad man, as bad as they make 'em. What are you lookin' for him for?" says he very curious.

An' that was a question I couldn't answer—not truthfully, anyhow.

"Oh! I'm not lookin'," says I. "I heard a story about him a few days ago, that's all. Seen him lately?" I says offhand.

"No," says Bradley, full of himself once more. "An' don't want to again, ever. Last time we met—at Liverpool, the day we paid off the hands—he wanted to kill me. He would have, too, if I'd given him half a chance. Only I didn't. You can see the scar on his chin now, where I hit him. I'd a belayin'-pin handy, in case—not wishin' to take any risks.

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An' from one thing an' another I felt certain that it was Red Martin who'd blown into Cardiff carryin' the little ship that I'd fixed on to the wall of Tommy Clarkson's berth.

WELL, not bein' a born fool I didn't waste any time in theorizin'. I'd have to make haste I knew, an' the question troublin' me was: Had Red Martin signed on again an' gone to sea, or was he in Cardiff still?

As a matter of fact he'd gone. That I discovered early the next mornin' when I was wonderin' what to do next—whether to pay a round of visits to every bar an' sailors' boardin'-house in the city or what. Instead of havin' to decide for myself, though, I run across one of the hands, a Cockney that we'd had on the last voyage.

"Hullo!" says I. "Hullo, George!" I says, an' he knowin' I'd no reason to like him for things that had happened, sheers off with his elbow crooked.

"I'm not troublin' you, Mr. Harrington," he says. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

The picture of misery he was—like he'd been sleepin' all night in the gutter an' fightin' mad tom-cats into the bargain.

"Broke?" says I, grinnin'.

"Broke!" says he. "Yes, I am," he says. "Some swine went through my pockets when I was sleepin' an' took every penny I had."

He seemed kind of nervous, and I didn't wonder.

"I'm feelin' queer," he says, "but——"

I knew what was comin' all right.

"Of course!" I says. "The usual thing, George, isn't it? Like at Odessa an' New Orleans an' Pensacola. I'm not surprised," says I. "You had money stolen in all them places, didn't you? Look here," I says, "have you heard of a man called Martin —Red Martin?"

He gives me a quick look, not quite satisfied like, out of the corners of his eyes.

"Red Martin," he says. "Why, yes, Mr. Harrington, I've heard of Red. I sailed with him five years ago out of Middlesboro' for the Black Sea. Once, an' once only."

"Not sailed with him since, have you?" I says.

"Never saw him till last Tuesday, week," he says.

I could almost have hugged him.

"What!" says I. "Where is he then?"

"Where? Not in Cardiff," says George. "He signed on for the *White Eagle* an' sailed for the Mediterranean four days ago. He told me so himself."

"Oh, Lord!" says I. "Then I've missed him."

"What d'you want him for?" says George, suspicious all of a sudden.

"Me!" says I. "I want to give him some money same as I'm givin' you. You've told me something I wanted to know," I says, an' then I pulled out a couple of bob an' told him to go try an' straighten himself up on it.

An' grateful! Gratitude's no word for it.

"Mr. Harrington," he says. "There's just one thing. Steer clear of Red, unless you're searchin' for trouble. He's no good! I knew him five years ago, an' unless I'm greatly mistaken he ain't changed.

"For somehow," he says, "I don't believe that about wantin' to give him money. There's something wrong, ain't there? All right then," says he, "you be careful in handlin' Red Martin, else you'll be sorry. An' when he's in Cardiff you'll find him at Limehouse Larry's boardin'-house."

So that was a little more to go on, wasn't it? But not much. It gave me a chance, though, to do the silliest thing I ever did in my life. An' that's sayin' a good deal.

I knew where I could lay hands on Red Martin at least, for the *White Eagle* was bound for Naples with coal. What must I do then that very night but sit down an' write to the man I was after. Now, has any man ever done anything more —— foolish than that? But I was young in those days an' didn't know any better. An' what was it I put in the letter? It makes me feel kind of ashamed of myself even now to remember it.

I wrote, actually wrote to Red Martin, in cold blood, an' what's more I was sober, sayin' I'd like to meet him when next he was home. I was tryin' to find out what had become of the *Banshee* an' her crew, an' something had come to my ears that made me think perhaps he could help me. This was what I put in the letter an' sent off to Naples after him.

Did I get any answer? I did not. Not a word. An' what happened then? This— I'll tell you:

The *Narcissus* sailed for Constantinople a couple of days later with coal, an' after foolin' around there for orders we were sent

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up the Black Sea for Sulina to load grain for home. First thing we arrived, what did I see but the *White Eagle* nearly down to her Plimsoll mark an' ready for sea. Me! I nearly went off into a fit. They'd come to the same port as us, an' I'd be able to lay hands on the man I was after.

Soon as ever we made fast I got leave from the chief—or maybe I didn't; it's immaterial, anyway—an' tramped back along the bank of the river to where the *White Eagle* was moored. I went aboard an' found the second mate in his berth.

Says I after I'd explained who I was:

"I'm lookin' for one of your deck-hands. There's some information he has that I'm after."

"An' the name?" says he, producin' the bottle out of his bureau. "Who is it you want?"

Son, I defy you to help admirin' the Scotch for two reasons: their hospitality's one, an' the other's the way they believe in supportin' their country's products.

"The name!" says I. "It's Martin. Red Martin he's known as, an' I'd like to speak to him."

With that the second mate of the *White Eagle* puts down his glass.

"Martin," says he, an' a curious look comes into his face. "Red Martin! Losh, mon, do ye no' ken the mon has desairted?"

"He has!" says I, struck all of a heap. "Deserted!"

"Aye," says the Scotchman. "Desairted. The queerest thing you could hear of. At Naples, two days before we were sailin' for this place."

"Any reason?" says I.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"If it was no' the letter, it was something we didn't know of."

"The letter!" says I, feelin' all cold in my innards.

"Aye," says he. "A letter. I was on deck when he read it, an' I seen the fear o' death in his eyes. That night he went off ashore after tea an' he never came back. It was the letter, of course, but what it had in it was more than the wit of man to discover. Trouble of some sort, at least."

An' that was all I could get from the second mate of the *White Eagle* save an' exceptin' a couple of glasses of Scotch whisky. I walked back to the *Narcissus* knowin' I'd thrown away all hope of findin' Red Martin easy, an' I could have kicked myself every foot of the way to Galatz an' back, just for bein' a fool. But why had he deserted? That's what I couldn't get at? What was the cause of it? There was some part of my letter that scared him, of course. An' which. The part about the *Banshee*, prob'ly. Then why?

I tell you, son, I was growin' more an' more puzzled an' worried. Red Martin knew maybe more than I ever dreamed, an' he was scared of his life. The very thought that some one might guess had drove him away from his ship, so it must have been bad.

Well, I'd lost my chance, through my own foolishness, no other word; but if Red Martin was still alive I'd find him. An' I did—nearly two years after I first bought the little ship from the pawnbroker on Bute Street.

I'D BEEN in Lord knows how many ports in that two years—Constantinople, Sulina, Algiers, Cardiff, Shields, New York, Portland, Maine, Rio, B. A., Belfast an' Antwerp, to name only a few—an' in every one of 'em I'd spent hours huntin' Red Martin. But I'd learned wisdom an' tact by this time.

I didn't talk more than was needed; I'd drop a few hints now an' again an' that's all. Such as:

"Did you ever meet a man, deck-hand, with red hair an' a squint an' the little finger of his right hand missin'? No good, that man," I'd say. "Bad reputation. Red Martin they call him," an' so on.

An' sometimes I'd find some one who'd heard of him or seen him or fought him. But I couldn't, not for the life of me, get hold of a clue that 'ud be any good.

He didn't seem to have gone to sea since the day he'd cleared out of his ship at Naples. He'd vanished. An' at last I began to lose heart—he was dead an' I'd never know how the ship that I'd given to Tommy Clarkson had come to be in the pawnbroker's window in Bute Street. What I couldn't get over was that the *Banshee* had been sunk fathoms deep in a typhoon, yet this little ship that we're lookin' at now, an' which had been fastened tight on to the wall of the second's room, had been saved.

How had it reached home when all hands were dead? Son, my head used to ache with the problem. Yet there must be some

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explanation, I knew. An' I'd get it; I swore to.

An' then one day in early Spring the *Narcissus* reached Cardiff once more, an' for the first time I thought that I'd do what George, the Cockney trimmer, had said, an' ask for Red Martin at Limehouse Larry's. I'd no hope, of course, not the slightest.

It was the kind of boardin'-house I'd expected—only a little worse—dirty an' dark an' small; just the very place that a sailor or fireman 'ud choose as a change from on board ship.

Limehouse Larry, a heavy-built man with a flat nose an' small eyes, was at the door in his shirt-sleeves, readin' a paper. I didn't waste any time in beatin' around. I just told him at once what I was after.

"Red Martin!" says he. "No, mister, he ain't been here for—why, it's pretty nigh two years now since we seen Red in Cardiff. An' you want him, eh?"

"Yes," says I. "I do." An' I says to myself, "That's all the reason you'll get out of me, my fat-bellied crimper."

But for some cause or other Limehouse Larry was inclined to be friendly. Also he wasn't sure of his ground. It don't do for a boardin'-house master even in these mild an' milky days to get in wrong with strangers, an' civility costs no money. He turns an' speaks over his shoulder to some one indoors.

"Any of you fellers run across Red Martin lately?" he says. "Rat, have you?"

Some one says: "Who the —— wants Red Martin?" an' a man comes to the door. "Police?" says he, a mean, low-down, pasty-faced little dock-rat.

"That's my business," says I.

"Well," says he, "maybe you are an' maybe you ain't. Personally," he says, "I hope that you are, an' I hope that you find him. If," says the Rat, "he gets twenty years it 'ull be no more than he deserves."

"You don't like him?" says I.

He laughs.

"Like him! Mister," says he, "if hate 'ud kill, Red Martin 'ud be dead four years ago. A sneakin', thievin' hound, that's what he is. Look at this," says the Rat, showin' me a mark under his ear.

"His work," he says. "I owe him something for that, an' I'll pay him. He did that with a boot when he was drunk."

But from the looks of the man who was speakin' I felt that Red Martin would have done some good in the world if he'd only finished his work an' saved the hangman a job later on.

"I don't suppose you know where I can lay hands on him, do you?" I says.

"Do I?" says the Rat. "Don't I?" He grins like he was pleased at doin' some one a bad turn. "How much is it worth?"

"A dollar," says I pretty sharp. "Not a penny more."

"Right," says he. "Let's see the money."

I took out two shillings an' a florin.

"Yours if you tell me."

"Well," says he, "I only heard yesterday. He's in Liverpool an' sick. A feller I know told me an' he got it from a girl that he met there.

"I don't know the address," says the Rat with a grin, "but if you find Nellie Seymour, you'll be able to find Red Martin, an' that ought to be easy. For there ain't many people on Pitt Street an' thereabouts who've not heard of Nellie Seymour."

"Now," says I, "I'll give you your money same as I promised I would. But," says I, "I think you're the meanest, dirtiest little coward that ever breathed. You got it into your head Red Martin was wanted by the police, didn't you? So you sold him for four bob! Well, you're wrong, I'm not from the police; it's a private an' personal matter between him an' me.

"An'," says I, throwin' the money into the gutter, "if ever you find yourself in the same ship as me, you pray, an' pray hard, for you'll know what hell is before your time."

I went back to Bute Street, feelin' more satisfied with myself than I'd done for ages.

Well, I made up my mind what to do. I'd ten days to myself before the *Narcissus* was ready for sea, an' that evenin' I left for the north, just on the hope of findin' Red Martin, the man who'd sold the little ship I'd given to Tommy Clarkson of the *Banshee*.

I suppose there's no part of the world where I'm better acquainted than Liverpool —barrin' the Tyne an' Cardiff, of course. Havin' friends is always a help anywhere; any old kind of friends, too.

Do you know Pitt Street, Paradise Street, Park Lane an' Hanover Street, an' all that part? No? Well, you're lucky. You don't want to. A police-sergeant who was by way of bein' a pal of mine—I'd done him a service once an' saved him his stripes; some

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day I'll tell you how—gave me a hint what to do. The rest was simple.

IT WAS about dusk, cold an' wet, an' the lamps just bein' lit when I found her. The girl, I mean.

Small built she was, an' thin, pale but for the two little sploshes of color in each of her cheeks, sharp-faced, dark-haired an' untidy, an' dressed in a big coat an' a big black hat with a feather like a London coster girl. I sized her up at a glance, everything.

"Beg pardon!" I says, "aren't you Miss Seymour? Nellie Seymour?"

She gives me a quick look, uncertain kind of an' serious, an' I seen then that she wasn't as young as I'd thought. She puts on a smile, same as they all do.

"Why, yes," she says. "An' now, where did I meet you? I know you, of course, so well, but I can't just remember the name."

I shook my head.

"No," says I, "you've not met me before. It's not that. Listen," I says. "I want you to help me. I mean no harm, none in the world, but I must see Red Martin tonight."

That frightened her an' she dropped all pretense.

"What for?" she says. "What do you want?"

"Just what I said," says I. "I want you to help me, an' I think that I can help you."

She tilted her chin in the air.

"Is it charity?" she says. "Keep it! We're not beggars," she says. "If we need money, we earn it."

An' her face would have been white but for the two sploshes of pink in her cheeks an' her lips.

"It's not charity," says I, "an' I'm not pryin' into what doesn't concern me. But," says I, "you'll be doin' both Red an' me a service if you let me see him. He can tell me something I want to know, an' that is the whole truth of the matter."

She thought for a minute, studyin' me careful, up an' down, from my head to my feet.

"He's sick," she says. "Awful."

She stopped again an' I didn't speak.

"Well," she says, "I'll trust you. An' why not? He's done no wrong, Red hasn't. We're not afraid, neither of us."

She turned an' made off.

"Come," she says, "I'll take you to him."

They lived at the top of a wretched old house let out to lodgers—high rent, bad quarters an' no questions asked—up four flights of stairs with the bannisters broken.

"This is it," she says, an' opened a door while I waited outside.

"Red," she says, "here's a gentleman come to speak to you."

"Who is it?" says a man's voice. "Come in, whoever you are, an' shut the door."

I stepped into the room just as the girl puts a match to the gas-jet.

In a bed in a corner was the man I was after. He'd a shock of red hair, an' one eye was set wrong in his head, sideways, kind of, an' there right on the point of the jaw was the scar that I'd heard of. A big man he was, broad an' strong, but as weak as a child, just able to lift his head from the pillow an' no more.

His face—an' it weren't a bad face, whatever they'd said, strong an' yet weak, that's all—his face had no blood in it, an' his cheeks were hollow; an' every now an' again he'd go off in a fit of coughin' that 'ud give you the horrors to listen to, let alone have. He was pretty far gone by the look of him, wastin' away, kind of.

"How are you feelin', Red?" says the girl.

"I'm better," says he with a smile. "Much better!"

I caught sight of his right hand on the quilt an' saw that the little finger was missin'. She stoops down an' kisses him.

"Red," she says, "here's some one to see you."

He tried to sit up in bed, but she wouldn't let him.

"Hush!" she says. "You'll tire yourself, Red, you're not to."

"Do you want to speak to me?" says he.

"Yes," says I, "if I may. It's important," I says, "an' I've come a long way to find you."

At that, son, he laughed. Just a thin whisper of a laugh an' it ended quick in a spell of coughin'.

"I knew," says he. "I knew the minute I heard. You've found me at last."

The girl puts her hand on his forehead.

"Red," she says, "what is it? Shall I send him away?"

But he gives her a smile an' motions to me with his chin.

"The *Banshee*, isn't it?" he says, an' I nodded.

"My God!" he says. "My God! I knew it would come some time. It had to."

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For a while we none of us says a word. Then Red Martin looks at the girl.

"Nell," he says— "Nell, dear, you'd better leave us. Do you mind? There's something private this gentleman wants to say to me." An' she goes out of the room softly.

I sat down by the side of the bed an' we watched each other like two boxers sparrin' for an openin'.

"Did I ever meet you before?" says Red suddenly.

"No," says I. "I've heard of you, that's all. I've been tryin' to find you for two years almost—just to ask you a question."

"Was it you, then, who wrote to me?" he says.

"To the *White Eagle* at Naples? Yes."

"Man," says he, "may you never feel like I felt when I got that letter. An' it was you, was it? I often wondered if I'd ever know." An' then—"Who are you?" he says.

"Me?" says I. "Harrington's my name an' I'm second engineer on the *Narcissus*, now at Cardiff."

He doesn't say anything, an' I put my hand into the side pocket of my big coat an' pulled out the little oak tablet on which was the copper ship.

"Red," I says, "have you ever seen this before?"

He kind of choked, an' there come into his thin face a look of fear an' misery an' something I didn't understand at the time, but did later.

"Great God!" says he. "Was it that then? Was that why you came after me? I wondered—I wondered often. I was mad! mad, of course. But I wanted the money, an' that was the only way I could get it. Did you know the *Arabella?*"

"I was second aboard of her the voyage she was sunk," says I.

"An' me," he says. "I was a deck-hand three years before."

"I saw this in a pawnbroker's window!" says I, "an' I went in an' bought it."

"Because of the ship?" says he. "The *Arabella?*"

"Yes," says I, "an' no. Because of the ship, an' because the little copper picture had been mine in the first place, bought from the man who made it, an' given by me to Tommy Clarkson the day the *Banshee* sailed on her last voyage."

The sick man was lyin' back on his pillow, starin' at me with a kind of horror.

"An' that's how it was, was it?" he says. "You, of all men! You! But how could I know? How could I tell when I unscrewed that piece of wood what it would lead to? Well, it don't matter. You saw it, an' that's enough. An' you've found me at last, somehow, so you'll hear how it happened, though I swore solemn I'd never breathe a word as long as I lived."

That, son, was how I came to hear the story of the *Banshee* an' Tommy Clarkson, told me by Red Martin—the queerest an' most unbelievable story you ever heard, an' such as you wouldn't hardly think possible even at sea where things happen that couldn't happen anywhere else. An' though I'd heard a good few yarns in my time the one Red Martin told me about the loss of the *Banshee* is queerer than all the rest of them put together.

IN MANY respects the *Banshee* was like the *Umballa*, bigger, that's all, by a couple of hundred tons—run the same way, of course, on the cheap—undermanned an' underfed. A long, narrer, ugly old cow of a boat, built on the Tyne, a bad sea-boat, with no give in her, an' like to roll the funnel out of the fiddley whenever she had the wind on her beam.

An' roll! She'd roll like a sow in a puddle of mud, just waller, day after day, just for the fun of it. A rough old ship was the *Banshee*, owned in West Hartlepool, an' you don't need no more recommendation than that.

Brandypeg Brown was the captain, a quick-tempered, hard-drinkin' old crab; a slave-driver naturally, or he wouldn't have had the ship. He'd take the *Banshee* anywhere or do anything, same as a Glasgow second engineer I was shipmates with used to say of the "Black Watch." But Brandypeg Brown didn't ask any questions, it was all one to him, pearl-poachin', runnin' a blockade in South America, filibusterin', gun-runnin'—he didn't care.

Just what the owners asked him to do he'd do it. But they paid him all right. They must have. An' from what he knew they must have breathed more than one sigh of rejoicin' when the news come that the *Banshee* had gone down with all hands.

Tommy Clarkson had been out of a billet for six months owin' to sickness when he

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went second mate on the *Banshee*. The best he could get, an' he wanted the money. He was gloomy over it, all the same.

"Why?" says I. "What's wrong with the *Banshee?* Brandypeg Brown chooses you for his second mate, yet you're kickin'!" Says I: "Don't you realize there's no higher praise you could have than that? For," says I, "he takes care to pick good men to work under him. He has to."

"But even that didn't bring any comfort to Tommy Clarkson. An' the mornin' they sailed I did as I told you, gave him this little copper ship here an' screwed it into the wall of his berth with four screws.

"There," says I, "that's to remind you of the time when you an' I were shipmates aboard of the *Arabella*." Which we had been for one voyage. "Take care of it, won't you?" I says.

"Yes," says he, "I will. It 'ull stay here on the wall till I leave the ship."

He was right in that, but not quite the way that he meant. An' I little thought when I watched the *Banshee* puttin' out to sea that afternoon that I'd never see him again, neither him, nor the ship, nor anything but this little copper plate with the piece of oak.

Just before Red Martin began I asked him a question. Says I—

"Tell me, were you one of the hands on the *Banshee* ever?"

Though he had said he'd unscrewed the copper ship from the wall, I wasn't sure if he meant it.

"One of the hands!" says he. "Why, yes!"

"When?" says I. "Not that voyage when——"

An' I didn't finish, not knowin' how.

"'Yes,' says he, 'that very voyage she was lost.'"

"Good God!" says I, sittin' back in my chair. "Then all hands weren't drowned after all!"

"'Of course not,'" says he. "'How could you have found the little copper ship if we had 'uv been? There was eight of us got out alive. The others are dead, though God knows that it wasn't by drownin' they died.'"

An' then he told me the story, little by little, all disconnected an' interrupted by coughin'. An' what a story! Listen, son, an' I'll tell it the same as he told me, or as near as I can.

IT WAS on the voyage home that the trouble broke out, but it had been brewin' from the day that they left Penarth. Just simmerin' same as it does always on a ship an' a voyage like that, until something, gen'rally some little thing, brings things to a head, an' hell's loose an' some one gets hurt. An' then, maybe, it's half-mast enterin' port an' a line or two in the log, sayin' on such-an'-such a night in heavy weather, Mr. So-an'-so, the mate or the second, was lost overboard. Can you wonder?

But on the *Banshee* it was worse than that by a —— sight. Can you wonder, with a skipper like Brandypeg Brown an' a mate with a bad temper an' a rotten tongue an' the habit of usin' his fists whenever he got a chance? An' from what Red Martin said, it was the mate's fault from beginnin' to end.

By the time they'd been two weeks at sea the hands were half-crazy an' ready for murder. You see, son, he'd chosen the wrong crew. Plug Ferguson, the mate of the *Mysore*, might have carried it through to a finish, but not the man who was mate of the *Banshee*. He'd nothin' behind the fist—no personality, if that's the word that I'm gettin' after. They hated him, but they weren't afraid.

An' he talked too much, talked in a way that a deck-hand will never forget, not so long as he lives. That's what Red Martin told me, just to explain how it started.

It don't matter much the ports they touched at durin' the trip, besides I've forgotten. All I'm certain about is they went from Penarth to Port Said with coal, an' then on through the ditch eastward. Heaven knows where! But at one time or another they put in at Hong-Kong an' Nagasaki an' Sydney. Finally they got orders to take a cargo of coal from Newcastle, New South Wales to Batavia in Java, where they were to load sugar for the U. K., or the U. S., or the Mediterranean.

"The only wonder to me," says Red Martin, "is that the mate wasn't killed weeks sooner'n he was. He carried a gun, though, an' was ready to use it. An' there's few men care to be runnin' the risk of swingin', just for the sake of killin' a thing like that in too great a hurry. So," says Red, "we waited, just waited an' talked. It was comin', of course. A hell-ship if ever there was one. No old wind-jammer bound for

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'Frisco round the Horn could have beaten the *Banshee*."

That's what he said, talkin' under his breath an' keepin' one of his eyes fixed on me an' the other lookin' toward the window.

Son, there must have been a curse over the ship from the very first. Nothin' seems to have gone right. An' on top of every thing, after all them months of misery, when they just got past Torres Strait an' into Arafura Sea, something carried adrift in the engine-room.

Many things might have happened, of course. Red Martin, bein' a deck-hand, didn't know much about it, save that they hove to for eight hours an' then went on again at a crawl, a few knots an hour only.

The weather was scorchin' hot, like you get it in those parts, moist an' sticky an' steamy. I know; I've been through it. Also the food was bad, rotten, crawlin', an' the cockroaches an' rats swarmed all over the ship, fore an' aft. The old man, Brandypeg Brown, was drinkin' himself to death, an' the mate kept on in the same old way, hazin' the crew, givin' 'em no rest, not even in that heat. What a voyage! I could see it all, just as Red told me, fillin' in all that he left out.

An' then, "Yes," says I, "an' what happened next?"

He clutched at my wrist an' for the rest of the time he was talkin' he held it.

"What happened next?" says he.

"Why," he says, "one mornin' one of the trimmers was taken sick. He couldn't get out of his bunk for breakfast an' he died before six bells in the forenoon watch. An' by tea-time two others were sickenin'.

"An' what was it?" I says.

Red looks up into my face kind of scared.

"Only the plague," says he. "That's what it was—plague!"

Think of it, son! That ship, the *Banshee*, like they were then, with the plague aboard! An' Red Martin shivered as if he could see the whole mis'rable business over again.

Within three days five of them died—the bo'sun, the trimmer who'd gone first, a fireman, a deck-hand an' the chief engineer. That left seventeen alive an' able to work. An' where would it end? They didn't know. How could they?

Brandypeg Brown kept on; he wouldn't turn back or put in anywhere. An' what port could they have put into, either? Islands by the hundred, of course: Timor, Wetta, Ombay, Gunong, Pantar, an' Lord only knows how many more. But what good were they? It was either Batavia, the port they were bound for, or else p'raps Samarang.

An' all the time there was Brandypeg drinkin' by himself in the chart-room an' the mate bullyin' the hands, treatin' 'em like they was dirt under his feet. An' they weren't Lascars or Chinks, neither, but white men, British seamen, dyin' of plague.

"Could you blame us?" says Red. "Could you blame us for what happened? He got all he deserved, no more an' no less."

It was a queer story Red Martin told me, lyin' there in his bed an' holdin' my hand. A queer, queer story, but I believed every word of it. I could see the whole thing—that shipload of men in the heat, mad with fear, plague aboard, the captain drunk, the mate —an' maybe he had his troubles same as the rest of 'em. I've wondered often if he weren't hazin' the crew just to make 'em forget, to take their minds off the death that was killin' 'em one by one, an' the bad food, an' that awful, sweatin' heat, an' the sharks followin' after the ship.

What a voyage! A nightmare, eh? Fear drove them. An', son, more often than not it's fear that makes men risk things, not courage, nor anything like it.

THEN one afternoon what had been threatenin' for weeks came. The chief engineer had been buried the night before, with old Brandypeg Brown, almost too drunk to stand, readin' a few words from the burial of the dead at sea, an' each of the men listenin', wonderin' who'd be the one to go next.

The day after what must the mate do but start off once more on his old game, only worse. Why? God knows! He wasn't drinkin'. Even that excuse couldn't help him. What followed he brought on his own shoulders.

Red told me he'd been tryin' to get some sleep, he an' two of the others, on the fo'c's'le, head under an awnin'. That's how he saw. One of the deck-hands, a big Swede, was chippin' paint on the bridge-deck, an' the mate came down from the bridge an' spoke to him. An' the Swede straightened up an answered him back.

None of them heard what he said, but the mate drew back a pace an' hit him hard on

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the jaw an' he went down in a heap on the deck. An' the mate laughed. That was the last sound he uttered.

The Swede got to his feet, with the blood all over his mouth, an' staggerin' like he was drunk. Then he seemed to them watchin' to go mad—he laughed also, an' the mate put his hand 'round to his hip-pocket, but it was too late.

The Swede swung his hammer over his shoulder an' brought it down on top of the mate's head. No man could ha' lived after that. The Swede just stared down at the man he had killed, an' all of a sudden threw up his arms an' pitched forward on to the body an' lay there without stirrin', not even when the fellers who'd seen came down the deck an' touched him.

"He was dead, too," said Red Martin. "Dead, an' none of us knew what had killed him."

Then one of the firemen, another Squarehead an' a pal of the man who'd been killed, knelt down an' took the mate's revolver out of his pocket.

That, son, was how it began—mutiny. Yes, mutiny on the high seas, on the *Banshee*. It didn't break out at a given signal. It wasn't arranged. Them kind of things aren't, gen'rally. It was fear an' the sight of the dead bodies—that did it. An' the whole time the ship kept on under way, the cranks turnin' an' the man at the wheel—the ord'nary seaman, so Red said—too frightened to move. Queer, that, wasn't it?

An' then Brandypeg Brown opened the door of the chart-room an' stepped out on to the deck an' Red Martin an' the rest of 'em stood in a group an' waited. The old man saw the two dead men, an' he stopped. He didn't speak, not accordin' to Red, but he tried his best to pull out his gun, same as the mate, but bein' stout in the body couldn't. The Squarehead fireman shot him through the chest.

What came next? Red didn't tell me, not in any detail, an' I didn't ask. An outline, that's all I wanted, an' that's all I got. What I'm tellin' you now is most what I've pieced together since.

Can you blame 'em exactly, those deckhands an' firemen on the *Banshee*? They didn't mean to do what they did. Things just happened. But what court of law in the world would have believed that they hadn't planned things deliberate?

I don't like to think too much of what followed. The engineer on watch, either the second or third, must have heard the shootin' an' rushed up on deck. Prob'ly he put his head into the other's room.

"Wake up!" he'd say. "For God's sake, come on deck! There's murder aboard."

Whether or no, when it was over, the second an' third engineers of the *Banshee* were dead, both of them, an' the carpenter had a bullet through his wrist.

An' so of the twenty-two human bein's that had left Newcastle, New South Wales, on the *Banshee* five were dead of plague, five had been killed that afternoon, an' one was wounded. That left eleven fit an' able to work—allowin' for the fact that they were all half-crazy with fear an' lookin' for death any minute. But of that eleven only one man had any knowledge of navigation—Tommy Clarkson, the second mate.

Do you see now what's comin'? The devilment of it all! It isn't hard to imagine it—my man, Red Martin, goin' aft with that gang of frightened murderers at his heels an' troopin' down the companion to the second mate. An':

"Mr. Clarkson, sir, might I speak to you a minute?" Like that, very respectable. An' the answer:

"All right, I'm comin'. What is it?"

"There's something wrong on deck, sir."

An' then Tommy Clarkson droppin' out of his bunk, seein' that crowd waitin' an' not hearin' the engines, an' knowin' the ship was hove to.

They took him on deck, not sayin' much, an' showed him the five bodies stretched out side by side near the fiddley, an' they gave him his choice. He could either do what they said, navigate the vessel, or they'd kill him. Sounds cruel, doesn't it? In cold blood, like that, too.

An' yet wouldn't most of us do what they did. Honestly, now! Wouldn't we? They were all in it as deep as each other. They wanted to save their lives. They were scared. An' he must have known, just by their faces, they meant what they said.

Would you have told 'em to shoot? Maybe you would. But I doubt it. You'd have done what he done—held out, promised anything, simply to gain time. No one wants to die sooner'n he needs, not that I've noticed, anyhow. It's sad, of course, but this wicked old world's got some attractions even to them that are all the time prayin' to be called quickly to everlastin' joy in the next.

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But Tommy Clarkson! Would he navigate the ship? He would. Would he obey orders? He would. So it was settled. They'd spare his life if he did what they ordered. If not, he'd die, same as the others.

An' their plans? Red Martin told me they'd arranged the whole thing—story an' all, every detail thought out beforehand. They'd make for Batavia still, that port bein' as good as any, an' they'd say that ten of the ship's company, includin' all the officers but the second mate, had lost their lives by fever or plague. Always supposin' that none of the others died, too, an' that was a fear not even Brandypeg's liquor could make 'em forget.

"We buried the dead almost at once," said Red Martin. "The five of 'em—the old man, the mate, the second an' third engineers an' the Swede. We didn't say no prayers," says he, "we couldn't. An'," he says, "the sharks were still followin' the ship. We could see 'em." An' that, son, was worse than anything else—the way that he said it.

He went on in a whisper.

"My hands aren't clean, either," he says. "It was me that killed the third engineer. I had to. It was him or me. He ran out on the deck an' saw me. I didn't——"

I stopped him.

"All right, Red," I says. "There's no need to worry."

After that he just lay very still without sayin' a word an' the woman looked in at the door an' went out when he shook his head at her.

The rest of the tale's not clear. Up to this point I see everything—the motives, the suddenness, the way things just came about—all the details dovetail into each other. But the last part of it's diff'rent.

Just think for a minute of that ship, the *Banshee*, with those twelve wretches, eleven it was soon, for the carpenter died of blood poisonin' an' drink on top of the wound in his wrist, with those eleven wretches steamin' for Batavia. An' on board, in their power, an officer! Would he betray them? They must 'uv spoken an' argued about it time an' time again. Would his word have held good against theirs? Prob'ly.

What's more, in them cases, there's always the one man who'll rat, who'll turn King's evidence—Queen's, it was then—an' tell all what happened, just for the sake of his own mis'rable skin. An' most likely there'd have been some flaw in the story as well. There always is. An' Tommy Clarkson! What were his feelin's? Those men were capable of any mortal thing under the face of Heaven. Did they trust him? An' what could he do, if they didn't? Nothin'—except wait. Would they kill him before they reached port? That thought could never have left him, not for a minute.

There was only the one way, of course. The *Banshee* would reach Batavia, with ten of the hands on board, an' no officers. That was their only hope.

Tommy Clarkson had been sentenced to death. He got a reprieve for a day or so, that's all—just because he could do them a service. Imaginin' things is not one of my strong points, but it isn't hard to imagine them fellers, the mutineers, talkin' in whispers of a night-time, workin' short-handed, each man watchin' the others for signs of plague, no discipline, the ship like a farmyard, only the blood-marks washed out, with Tommy Clarkson pacin' the bridge an' the donkeyman runnin' the engines, an' both of 'em sleepin' in snatches.

Did he know he was doomed? Yes, son, he must have. But was he afraid? Prob'ly he'd reached the place where fear'd left him. He hadn't room for it alongside of his other thoughts. Also, he knew he was safe till he'd brought them in sight of Batavia. But they never reached there. That's where he fooled 'em.

"Red," says I, "what about Mr. Clarkson? Did you kill him?" I says, as if killin' was the most ord'nary thing goin'.

He shook his head.

"No," says he. "We didn't." An' then he looked at me kind of scared. "We had to think of ourselves," says he, "but nothin' happened the same as we planned. Mr. Clarkson put the fear of death on us, that's never been absent from that day to this."

Yes, son, that was the way Red Martin put it, lyin' there in his bed, three years after that hell's-voyage on the *Banshee*.

"Well," says I. "An' what was it he did?" An' he told.

Next time you happen to be in the chart-room get hold of the chart of the Malay Archipelago, an' then trace the course of the *Banshee* after the killin' in Flores Sea to Batavia past the Karimon Javas, north of Samarang, an' the Thousand Islands. Java itself is about six hundred miles long, as far

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as I know, an' the *Banshee* was perhaps makin' three knots. If you fix that in your mind, maybe you'll be able to understand what happened next.

ONE evenin', just before sunset, they sighted land, an' the *Banshee* kept on her way steady, with no one on board worryin' much about Tommy Clarkson. He told 'em they'd reach Batavia in a day an' a half, an' none of them havin' been there before an' not knowin' the coast, they believed what he said.

In the dead of night, about two bells or four bells in the middle watch, Tommy went aft, leavin' one of the hands half asleep at the wheel. He must have been, else he was deaf. Whether or no, he didn't hear what he might have heard if he'd only been listenin'.

The night bein' clear an' fine; there was no look-out on the fo'c's'le head, naturally. That helped, too. Tommy Clarkson left the bridge an' went aft, an' that was the last ever seen of him.

"Yes," says Red with his little chokin' laugh. "He disappeared. We never saw him again."

"Drowned?" says I.

"No," says Red. "He went off in the smallest of the four boats we had, the dingey. He lowered it gradual into the water, slid down the falls an' went astern." An' that was the end of the second mate of the *Banshee*.

An' the hands! They couldn't tell what had become of him, whether he'd be picked up or be drowned, or get to shore an' be killed by natives or reach some settlement where he could give the alarm. An', as Red said, from the moment he made off, not one of those men on the *Banshee* could breathe easy.

"An' what happened next?" I says. "The day after he left the ship."

"We didn't know where we were quite," says Red. "He'd not taken us anywhere near Batavia, of course—we knew that much at least. But he'd not marked the chart—not properly; he'd traced about nine diff'rent courses, each one of which might have been ours."

Son, think for a minute what it must have been like for the men on the *Banshee!* Where were they? All they knew was that they were lost. Tommy Clarkson might have taken them northwest from Flores Sea to Borneo, or further west to Billiton Island, or Banka, or even Sumatra. They didn't know, how could they?

"An'," says Red Martin, "there was only the one thing we could do."

"An' that?" says I.

"We beached the ship," says Red. "Ran her aground in a small, sandy bay, black mud an' mangroves, with cliffs behind."

That's how they got rid of the *Banshee*, an' on the whole, knowin' the facts, I think they were wise.

An' at last Fate seemed to be helpin' them. By the time that the ship was hard an' fast, heelin' over into the sand, it was blowin' a livin' gale. An' in less than an hour a typhoon burst over 'em.

"An'," says Red Martin, "it was in that blow that the *Banshee* was supposed to have gone to the bottom with all hands."

"But," says I, "what did you do with the ship?"

"I'm comin' to that," says Red. "We set her on fire. But before that we spent about two whole days gettin' things ready."

They were careful, too, I'll say that for 'em. They took no chances. They even scraped off the name wherever they found it, in case it mightn't be burnt quite.

"An'," says Red, "we got one of the lifeboats provisioned with food an' water, an' rigged up a mast an' a sail made out of an awnin'. Then," says he, "we divided all the money we'd found in the captain's room, went through the ship once more an' when that was done set her alight, an' waited till she was burnin' from stem to stern before leavin' her."

If they were picked up by a passin' ship—an' there was always the chance—well, then they'd say that the *Banshee* had sunk in the typhoon an' trust to the second mate not bein' saved. But that was their great an' terrible fear, that they'd be sighted an' taken to port an' that the second mate 'ud be waitin' to have them given in charge as murderers.

"Which we weren't," said Red Martin. "Not really. We hadn't meant to kill no one," says he. "It was the mate's fault for hittin' the Swede, an' the other Squarehead's for shootin' the old man."

His voice was gettin' weaker, gradual, an' his breathin' seemed to be hurtin' him. P'r'aps I ought to have called the girl or something, but I wanted to hear the end of the yarn.

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"Were you picked up?" says I.

"No," says he. "Though three times steamers passed quite close to us at night."

"Did you reach any port?" says I.

He nodded his head.

"Yes," says he, but he didn't say which.

They landed some miles along the coast from wherever it was, an' separated, movin' into the town in twos an' threes.

"There was only eight of us by this time," says Red.

"What became of the others?" says I.

"The steward," he says, "was bit by a cobra soon after we came ashore, an' died. An' one of the firemen——"

An' there Red stopped.

"Yes?" says I.

"We'd agreed to obey orders," says Red. "An' he knew the punishment."

I understood then what had happened.

"Before we cut adrift from each other," says Red, "we swore solemn that never so long as we'd life in our bodies would we tell what we'd done. An'," says he kind of smilin', "I'm breakin' my oath."

"Red," says I, leanin' forward an' askin' the question I'd had on my mind for two years; "Red, what of the little copper ship that I gave Mr. Clarkson?"

He smiled.

"I'd seen that," he says, "screwed to the wall of the second's room, an' I took a fancy to ownin' it. Because I'd been on the *Arabella* myself, as I told you. A year later," he says, "I sold it. I'd been drinkin' an' I needed the money. How could I tell that the man who gave it to Mr. Clarkson 'ud see it?"

An' then I turned the piece of oak 'round, same as I done just now, an' showed him the initials, A. H. to T. C.

"I never saw 'em," says Red. "Never! But," says he, "from the day that we left the *Banshee* up till now I've lived in dread that the second mate 'ud come back. I've heard of men bein' lost in them places along with the natives for years an' years an' then bein' found."

"That was why," says he, "I went half-crazy with fear when I got that letter at Naples. For the name might have been put on just to deceive me. I thought that it was, an' that Mr. Clarkson was back."

"Red," says I, but he doesn't answer.

He lay back on the pillow, worn-out, an' the grip on my fingers loosed. Then the girl came into the room an' he opened his eyes an' smiled at her.

"Red," she says, "what is it?"

"It's all right, Nellie," he says. "I've told an' I'm feelin' easier than I've felt for a long time."

"Does it hurt you at all, Red?" says I.

"Hurt!" says he. "Why, no! I'm nearly well, but for the cough. Weak, that's all." An' he spoke like he knew it was true.

"Have you all that you want?" says I. "Medicine, food, things like that?"

"Yes," he says. "I have. Nellie's the best girl in the world. She's been spendin' her money an' nursin' me ever since I've been sick. An'," says he, "I can't say that she mustn't. She's the best an' the bravest girl in the world, an' I'm not worth what she's doin'."

"Red," she says, "don't, please! You mustn't say them kind of things."

Her face was white, whiter by far than it had been, an' she looked at me quickly, sort of beggin' me not to speak an' afraid that I might.

"Yes, Nellie," says he, an' a wreck of a man he was, too, thin an' wasted to skin an' bone almost. Yes, Nellie," he says, "it's the truth, an' as soon as I'm better, I'll do as I said, an' I'll marry you."

She bent over an' kissed him to hide the tears. Women are queer things—men, also, if it comes to that. She loved him, at least, an' that's more than you can say for some, for all that they promise. A queer kind of mix-up, wasn't it?

I sat there by the bed, in a daze, seein' everything: the eight mutineers, or ten, mad with fear, the plague an' the sick men dyin'; the mate an' Brandypeg Brown, the five dead bodies stretched on the deck, an' Tommy Clarkson all by himself on the bridge, takin' the *Banshee* out of her course an' then castin' himself adrift in the boat. What a voyage! What a terrible voyage!

An' the end of it all! The little copper ship in the pawnshop window in Bute Street, Cardiff, down near the docks, an' Red Martin, sick in bed in a Liverpool slum.

Some one tapped at the door an' I turned to the girl.

"It's the doctor," she says.

"Good-by, Red," I says, givin' him my hand. "Good-by, an' I'll come an' see you tomorrer."

"The finest girl in the world," says he in

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a whisper, "an' as soon as I'm well, I'll marry her."

As I went out I passed the doctor.

"Been visitin' a friend of mine," I says. "Havin' a chat about old times."

NEXT mornin' I kept my promise an' strolled round to see Red Martin again. I climbed the stairs to the little room at the top of the house an' knocked. There was no answer, so I knocked once more. An', after a time, thinkin' maybe Red might be sleepin' an' the girl out, I pushed open the door an' entered on tip-toe.

I was wrong, though—they were both in the room, the pair of 'em—the girl on her knees by the side of the bed, cryin', an' Red Martin, with a smile on his lips an' the lines smoothed out of his face, dead.

An' as I stood there by the door, it seemed like he'd found rest from his troubles. Maybe he had. We can't tell about those things, none of us, not even the parsons. An' I wondered then if what he'd done was as bad as he'd thought. He hadn't set out in life intendin' to kill an' murder an' take hold of the *Banshee*, had he?

Perhaps it was made all right where he'd gone to—everything understood an' allowed for. An' there was the girl, too. An', son, remember this, an' it's true, no man can be all bad, if there's a woman to cry when he's dead.

I didn't speak to her. I just went out softly an' left them together.

Weird story, isn't it? An' that's how I learned of the castin' away of the *Banshee* an' the reason the little ship come to be in the pawnbroker's window in Cardiff.

Forty Dollars A Foot

A Holy Holly Story

by Gordon McCreagh

Author of "Featuring Morton St. Clair," "The Brass Idol," etc.

"HOLY" JIM HOLLY leaned luxuriously against a tree with his hands folded behind his head and smiled out with perfect satisfaction at the glorious view, while his big barrel-shaped chest took in sundry cubic yards at a breath of cool pine-scented Himalayan air.

"Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile," he quoted dreamily, inspired doubtless by the preparations for grim war which were taking place in the glade before him.

A straggly line of E. P. tents had already been erected to the accompaniment of much noise. Before them stood a weird assortment of Martini-Henry carbines, Lee-Metfords, and even old .500 Sniders, leaning

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drunkenly against one another in threes.

A yet stranger assortment of Hindus, with a fine disregard for the conventions, were inserting themselves into uniforms which didn't fit, and which might have been Tenth Dogras, or Seventy-second Punjabis, or both. A couple of white men, officers, rushed about and tore their hair and shouted the five words of Hindustani abuse which they collectively knew.

Everybody was upset and excited—except Holly, who wrinkled his freckled nose yet higher and smiled at the landscape with perfect contentment. Presently another white man emerged from a somewhat more elaborate tent, bearing in his arms a complicated mechanism which explained the whole extraordinary proceeding, a tripod and camera, all heavily brass-bound and fitted with sundry cranks and levers.

It was an "outside set" of the British Indian Film Company, who dealt, so said the posters, in "topical, historical, and educational films of the highest grade."

Holly was emphatically not of the "B. I.'s." He belonged to the "Motioscope," a despised foreign concern from New York. Which perhaps explains why one of the officer-men, the biggest of them, presently made a hostile sortie from his own camp.

"I say," he began.

Holly was by this time earnestly watching the thin blue smoke-rings from his pipe circle up and break against the leaves overhead. He was too intent to reply.

"I say! Mr. Fitzgerald doesn't want you hanging about this camp."

"Hospitable man," murmured Holly through a cloud of smoke without looking down.

His good humor aggravated the biggest of the officer-men.

"Well, you'd better get out!" he snapped belligerently.

Holly squinted down at him sideways. He blew three more rings with careful accuracy before replying cheerfully, while he still watched them ascending one through the other.

"M-hm? Well, I don't see anything in sight to occasion such a hurry."

Holly's unconcern was infuriating—and he stood not more than five feet and eight inches. Which, coupled with the fact that he was apparently off his guard, again explains, perhaps, why the biggest of the officer-men was misguided into rushing at him.

Then Holly laughed out loud. He suddenly sprang into strenuous life, like a sleeping puma when a bullet splashes on the rock above it. While one hand transferred the pipe to his pocket, a massively muscled arm flashed from behind his head and encircled the other's neck. Then the officer-man felt an excruciating wrench at his chin, another at his back, and a third at his knee; felt himself whirl through the air; and the next bewildered observation he was able to make was of stag-moss within two inches of his face, while an arm and toe-hold held him helpless, and an extremely solid knee rested in the small of his back.

"That's a Japanese trick," Holly's voice rose pleasantly above him. "Jiu-jitsu. You really ought to learn some before you aim to destroy anybody again."

Then the biggest of the officer-men was lifted and pushed carefully and resistlessly into a tangle of bougainvillea creeper, the curved thorns of which hold to one's clothes like millions of fish-hooks.

"And now," continued the voice with contemplative enjoyment, "since I don't feel up to fighting your whole camp this morning, I shall go home."

The officer-man, helpless and homicidal, heard the footsteps receding, and shortly after, more footsteps approaching hurriedly, those of his own people, who had to bring their knives into play to extricate him.

Holly was just topping the next ridge when they finished. He turned and waved to them with friendly insult.

"Yes, you'd better hurry," called one of the men, like the discreetly valiant schoolboy who shouts from down the block, "before Mr. Fitzgerald comes back. He'll square you; he's just waiting for a chance."

"So I've heard," called Holly. "That's why I'm running away." And he strode to the home bungalow, smiling out at the whole world on that beautiful morning with the most engaging friendliness.

HE BROKE into the living-room, whistling sibilantly through his teeth; and then hushed abruptly at the door in reverent admiration. Crandal, traveling director of the Motioscope, was perched on the end of a table like a gaunt adjutant stork, and was soaring in one of

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his most artistic flights of oratory concerning one Fitzgerald, his personal attributes, his probable descent, and his certain destination. Crandal flapped his arms and craned his neck, while he proved once again his claim to true rhetorical genius; and this in spite of the fact that his elocution was considerably hampered by the presence in the room of a lady.

Miss Helen Redfern, star, sat by the window with an unconscious frown, indicative of recent annoyance, puckering her most adorable profile, while the sunlight diffused squirrel-red through her fluffy masses of hair.

Holly tiptoed reverently in, like a latecomer at church, and softly took a seat that he might the better appreciate both the discourse and the perfect silhouette at the window.

"Said you'd stand a much better chance with his company, did he?" declaimed Crandal. "The bloated Bactrian! Said he was making better film, huh? And you told him our last jungle-book series was valued at forty dollars a foot in New York? Good for you, girl! And what d'you think that bag-bellied conger said, Jim? Said if any bloomin' Yankee could show him film at forty dollars a foot, he'd jolly well let him kick him; and no blasted foreigner had ever done that yet. Offered her a hundred piking dollars to go with him. Thought he was raising her. What d'you think of that, Jim? Crandal snorted explosively, and re-executed his whole impromptu with masterly variations.

Holly still grinned in wide appreciation; but the tough cane-chair creaked under the blow pressure of his wide hands, on which the knuckles suddenly showed white.

"So-o?" he purred. "Trying to steal our Squirrel, was he? Holy Jemima! If I'd known that, I'd have waited at his camp and broken his foreign record for him."

The subject of Crandal's eloquence was a big and beetle-browed giant who often cast himself for the rôles of the film detective, or the lumber-camp hero; yet it never occurred to Crandal to doubt Holly's ability.

"Yes," the girl broke in. "And when I refused him point blank, he turned nasty and boasted that he would put us, and particularly you, Jim, out of business. You might think you were clever, cutting in on the Indian films; but he'd jolly well put a spoke in your bally wheel." Her drawling imitation was perfect.

"Some day," remarked Holly with finality, "I shall commit a European atrocity on that pachyderm. Some day soon."

Crandal unfolded himself like a foot-rule and got down from his perch in sections. He was appeased. Holy Holly's immutable word had gone forth—and Holly weighed about two and a half pounds to the lineal inch, all oil-tempered springs and tan-leather finish.

But the matter of Fitzgerald was only a part of the cloud that darkened the director's horizon. His company was encamped at Rangpo in Sikkhim, twenty miles from the Tibetan border, and he was now waiting for the return of Tracy, leading man, who had gone to interview his Honor, the political officer in charge of tibetan affairs. The great annual ceremony of the much-talked-of but little-known devil dance of Tongtsa Jong was due, and Crandal had already mapped out an elaborate scenario to fit in.

One of Crandal's most successful exploits, which was making his films such a sensation in New York, was his trick of building dramatic scenarios around weird and unusual native ceremonies. He spent money on these which made the New York management weep; but they were always pacified by the resulting film, which was amazing—when he could overcome the appalling difficulties in the way of getting it.

He had written in this case to the "Political" to obtain what he had thought would be a purely formal sanction, and had been surprised to receive in reply a curt letter of refusal. Since the "Political" just at present was one of those amazing blunders of the Indian Government, a Bengali official acting temporarily during the absence on short leave of his superior, it seemed probable that there might be some misunderstanding. And Tracy had accordingly been sent to call on him officially, with his best clothes and most engaging manner, to try and straighten the thing out.

Presently the door opened and Tracy came in, a heroically handsome figure, as was befitting to a film idol.

"Well?" demanded Crandal eagerly.

Tracy laid his silk hat and gray gloves carefully on the table.

"Nothing doing, Chief!"

"What?" gasped Crandal. "D'you mean

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to say he meant what he wrote? What reason did he give?"

"Well, he was very up-stage at first; but I flattered the gink about his responsible position, and he finally confided to me that after the Younghusband expedition the Indian Government was tied up with all sorts of cast-iron treaties with Russia and China about the inviolability of Tibet, and they could allow no private individuals or commercial enterprises to go in at all. Said the Forbidden Land was more forbidden now than it ever had been."

Crandal lifted his hands to Heaven and prayed for fitting speech.

"Great gosh!" he raved. "This prehistoric government-thing is my jinx. It's never failed yet. I go into the desert to photograph a sand-flea and somebody waves regulation number eight thousand and three at me. I hide myself in the middle of the jungle, and a man in uniform shows me Penal Code, para. six million. I move into the desolate mountain-tops, and a coon with a diplomatic ribbon on his chest says, '*Es ist verboten!*'

"Couldn't you move him any? Couldn't you reason with the primeval ape?"

Tracy shook his head.

"He was adamant. Said the thing was quite impossible."

"Perish the cannibal fish! What the ——" Crandal restrained himself and took a long breath, possibly to count a hundred before he committed himself. "Impossible?" he said at length more calmly. "Well, then it's up to you, Holly!"

"Holy Gemini!" snorted Holly. "Can I hypnotize the whole fossilized Government and unwind five million miles of red tape?"

"See here, Jim," Crandal insisted coaxingly. "We've just *got* to have that devil dance. It's unique. And my scenario'll have the five-centers back home hopping like they'd found an ant's nest. It'll be the best yet. Go ahead and think up something to sidestep the impossible. You're here to do miracles anyway."

Holly was about to disclaim all responsibility in the matter, when he became aware that the girl was watching him expectantly. He stood in perplexity and ran his fingers characteristically through his hair, till he looked like a tawny porcupine. Finally he grunted like the same beast rooting for yams and muttered, "*Inshallah!*" and strode from the room.

And the council of war broke up forthwith in perfect contentment. When Holly grunted in the ultimate depths of disgust and called on a heathen god, things presently began to occur.

IT WAS late in the afternoon when he came back, sizzling with energy, and pensively serious for once.

"Got to hustle and get out of here, Chief," he announced.

"Great gosh! What's up now? Get out, why? Where to?" wailed Crandal.

"To Tongtsa-Jong, of course. To make devil-dance film. Where'd you think?" said Holly coolly.

Crandal whopped like a schoolboy.

"Oh, Holy Saint Holly! How did you fix it?"

"I haven't fixed it. But I'm going to, somehow. Listen! Here's what the little birds say: It seems that dear Fitz is most carnivorously annoyed at me, for many though insufficient reasons; and at you for bringing a company to breathe this air, which, being an Anglo-Indian, he has a vested interest in. So he's already been inserting his threatened spoke. He's been to see the political babu with just the right line of goods for an Oriental, and the babu has sold him the permission to get this devil-dance picture. Gone partners on it, in fact. Fitz hands over three thousand dollars and the coon puts in his influence to help him and block us. So it all works around to the same old combination. We're up against the official proposition once again."

Holly grinned happily at the thought. Government officials were his hereditary enemies, and he had waged a lone-handed war against them for many years—greatly to the detriment of the officials.

"Now here's how it works out," he continued. "Being a case of black and white, these two slick guys don't trust each other for two cents. Fitz gives him fifteen hundred down and fifteen hundred as soon as he's got the picture. The babu can't be on hand all the time; but he'll show up on the ground and collect before Fitz can make a get-away. In return he furnishes a permit for Fitz's crowd and instructs the British guard at Chumbi that a Government survey party is going through. Some con game, hey? Now your Uncle Jim is going to divert this cunnin' li'l' permit; and the survey party's going to be you. But you'll

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have to be ready to hand him over fifteen hundred dollars in ten-rupee notes—no checks or big money for the wily Aryan."

"By gosh! It will be worth it!" enthused Crandal. "And that picture will be dirt cheap at the price. Jim, you're a gem!"

"Uh-huh," grunted Holly indifferently. "Now I've got to hustle and have an inspiration about getting that festive permit, and how to delay, kidnap, or destroy Fitz and his crowd. I'll join you again somehow, somewhere, sometime. So-long!"

He strode out, running his fingers through his hair and whistling in minor discords. And Crandal proceeded without a further care in his soul to begin getting his ponies and porters and other paraphernalia together for a start with sunrise into the Forbidden Land.

THE desired inspiration came to Holly, and with it the luck which so often attends those who are taking daring chances—or is it the readiness to snatch at chance when it comes, which itself constitutes what the other fellows so often call luck?

As the sun was dipping behind the towering tiers of everlasting snow—which are due north; but it does, all the same—and tinting them ivory and pale rose and amber, a sturdy Gurkha orderly left the political residence with a "peon book" thrust through his belt and swaggered through the little settlement. At the very fringe of the B. I. camp Holly suddenly appeared and walked unconcernedly to meet him.

"From the babu sahib? *Budmash*, you have delayed at the liquor-shop. I have waited these two hours."

"Nay, sahib, I have but half an hour back received the letter."

"*Choop!* Enough. Give it to me."

Holly took the missive and scrawled a swift hieroglyphic in the receipt column of the book.

"It is well. Convey my salaams to the babu sahib."

Ten minutes later the precious permit was in Crandal's hands.

Later again, when it was already dark, Fitzgerald of the B. I.'s stamped ponderously up and down in his camp and cursed vindictively the dilatoriness of all natives. And then, when he was just about to send a messenger up to the residence, another orderly, gorgeously turbaned and fiercely bewhiskered, came up with a note, and having delivered it, squatted down on his heels.

"There is no answer," he said simply. "It is an order that I remain."

The note was a hasty scrawl. It ran:

MY DEAR MR. FITZGERALD:

On second thoughts I am sending you one of my orderlies, who will personally conduct you. He speaks English, and will make all arrangements. I am notifying the frontier guard. Yours, etc.,

DASS-MEHRA.

Fitzgerald turned eagerly to the man.

"When do we start?" he demanded impatiently.

The man's English shortly disclosed itself to be a series of stepping-stones of the smaller words bridging the uncertain distance between the large ones, which were all in the vernacular.

"Tomora I making *bandobast* for pony, sahib. Next day early *fujjur* starting. You need pony, four, for sahibs; *Khutcher*, mule, three, for pack instrument. *Saices*, bearers, all things I make *bandobast*, give sahib account."

However, the man appeared very capable and decided about his arrangements, and Fitzgerald was thankful to have somebody who knew the country to take the burden off his hands. The man proved most efficient. He collected the cavalcade, with the necessary attendants, all in one day, exactly as he had promised, which was an unprecedented feat for a native; and early on the following morning, "plenty *fujjur*," as he had promised, he awoke the sahibs and insisted on a start.

"Must travel twenty *kos* today. Sleep *dak-bungaloo*, over Tibet border. Plenty climb."

His last laconic statement was right. The road wound steeply up through dense, dripping forests where wonderful orchids, which would have driven a collector crazy, hung where they could be picked without dismounting. Always up, clinging to the side of tremendous precipices, the depths of which were mercifully hidden by the thick white mist.

The members of the company started by being ravished at the scenery and exhilarated by the cool mountain air; and then, as nature's panorama stretched on for mile after steep mile, the monotony of scenic loveliness began to pall, and they began to get saddle-chafed from the unaccustomed

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angle at which they had to sit, or rather cling.

They began to clamor for some lunch. But their guide insisted that it was necessary to keep on and reach the rest-house before darkness came on and made that dangerous road altogether impossible. He himself appeared to be tireless, and with the *saices* and bearers, hillmen all, climbed up the almost perpendicular short-cuts like so many monkeys and lounged, easily waiting for the horses to catch up, along the winding road.

Fitzgerald and his companions were almost dead with gripping on to their saddles to keep from slipping backward over their horses' tails, by the time they crawled stiffly off at that thrice-blessed rest-house, which nestled in a sheltered hollow on the bleak summit of that tremendous ridge to keep from being swept off into space by the howling, biting winds, like everything else for the last two thousand feet except cold rock and frozen brown earth.

"Plenty climb. Eighteen thousan' feet," said the guide with satisfaction, as if he were responsible for the magnificent view.

On one side, the side they had come up, was a sea of opaque, billowing mist, out of which stuck little green islands of mountain-tops; and on the other, in sharp contrast, was a startlingly clear view of a great bowl-like valley, the valley of Chumbi, Tibet.

But the wretched travelers were not in any fit frame of mind to discuss Himalayan phenomena. They sat in blistered torment and cursed their guide with their five words of Hindustani and a vast collective store of soulful English. And the guide, with Oriental apathy, said only:

"Tomora *fujjur* we go Chumbi; plenty early *fujjur*. Tomora long march."

The next morning he awoke them relentlessly at a perfectly criminal hour, and when they crawled out of the rest-house, sore and querulous, they found him supervising the careful loading of the pack-mules, so that no photographic apparatus should be visible; after which he personally attended to the roping of the packs, tying cunning knots which even the mule *dorabis* did not understand. Finally he was satisfied; and a new torture commenced for the unhappy B. I.'s, the torture of holding back on the steep down-grade.

Presently the guide left the so-called road, which, however, was a paved and paradisiacal highway in comparison with the goat-track which he now followed. Yet not a pack slipped, so cunning had been the tying of the expert. Not so the riders, however. They were so weak in the legs with convulsive gripping of unaccustomed saddles that each time a horse stumbled one of them fell off, like the white knight in "Alice."

The orderly with a mask-like face explained that the Government road went straight through the valley to Chumbi, and was guarded by the British fort, while the track, which was unfrequented and little known, skirted high up along the edge of the bowl and was guarded by a small detachment of Punjabis who, he said, were more amenable to the babu sahib's instructions.

When they came to this outpost, however, in the late evening, something seemed to be wrong. A long-winded argument ensued, which the white men, though they could not understand a word of it, could plainly see was unsatisfactory.

"What's the matter?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"He say, there is no order."

Fitzgerald was perplexed. He was also sore physically and harassed mentally. Which was quite sufficient for him to lose his control and break into a bellowing torrent of curses and threats. The orderly shrugged his shoulders and leaned sullenly against one of the tired mules.

And then suddenly something gave way, and in some miraculous manner the whole pack slipped to the ground—and the wrapping opened, and the contents scattered loose over the road. Not a knot in the carefully tied rope had held.

The soldiers pounced upon the goods with astonishment, and a further noisy discussion took place. They were not very clear in their minds what the articles were; but they were certainly not surveying instruments as the frenzied manager claimed.

This needed investigation. The Subahdar in charge explained that the party would have to be detained till the matter could be brought before their officer, who had gone to Chumbi—and Chumbi was now two days' journey distant, a whole day back to the main road, and another day on from there; four days before any sort of answer could be brought; and by that time the devil-dance ceremony would be over. The orderly shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"What's it all about? What does he

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say?" demanded the now raving manager of the British Indian Film Company.

"He say, you prisoner. Keep in jail. Take before officer."

"But my God! When? Where? We've got to hurry!"

"God he knows," lied the orderly glibly. "Maybe to Lhassa; take one mont, two mont." With which cheering information he shrugged again and moved off down the path.

"Hey there," shouted the Subahdar. "Where goest thou?"

"I have business," said the orderly calmly. "I go."

"There is no order."

"Nevertheless I go."

"Fetch the insolent dog back," commanded the Subahdar. "Swiftly now!" he added as the man went unconcernedly on.

Two troopers ran after him and quickly came up, one on either side, to take hold of him. Then suddenly the slouching orderly moved like a snake. One of the troopers received an elbow smashed hard into the pit of his stomach, and the same circled around and up and took the other under the chin. The orderly made a great leap, far down the steep bank. And all that was left when the others raced up, were two groaning men on the ground and a low chuckle of laughter far down the hillside.

Two evenings later an exhausted man, dressed as an orderly, lurched into the old monastery at Tongtsa-Jong, which on few-and-far-between occasions did duty for a rest-house, and saluted military fashion before Crandal, who was already established there.

Crandal looked at him closely.

"Not this time, Jim," he laughed. "I've got used to your little dramatic surprises; though if I hadn't seen you do it before I wouldn't have believed it was you. Bully for you, boy! We got through Chumbi like a bird. They never let out a squeal. How about Fitz?"

"Left him tangled up on the old trail. We've got four days. How did the Red Squirrel stand the journey?"

"Fine! She's got sand, has the Squirrel. Four days you say? Good! The devil dance is day after tomorrow; and I've got my camp all staked out for some outside sets tomorrow; got about a hundred Tibetan supes, too, for the proper atmosphere; we can fake the rest afterward. Jim, this is going to be a record. But say, you look tired. Want anything to drink?"

"I want about ten pounds of something to eat," said Holly. "And ten hours' sleep."

THE next day was a strenuous one for everybody. Crandal's scenario required some intricate setting. Since suspense, we are told, constitutes a prolific source of punch, and there is no suspense so thrilling to the nickelodeon fiends as the uneven course of true love, Tracy, as a Lama of the higher circle, was called upon to commit the indiscretion of falling in love with the Squirrel, who portrayed the impossibly lovely daughter of a ruffianly mountain chief, a situation which gave scope for much complicated intrigue and many heroics.

Tracy was strong on heroic stuff. The uncertainty of Holly's presence had saved him from being cast for a part in the story, for which he was inexpressibly thankful; but he had his hands more than full trying to hammer into the densely stupid Tibetan supes what was required of them—even with the aid of an interpreter who had managed to persuade Crandal that he could "speak Tibetan Sar, all same Bhutia talk."

The heavy-eyed herd stared owlishly at the little dressing-tents, and they regarded Herman's dark-room tent, with its little red window, fearfully, as some mysterious house of *Jhandi*, and surged together like frightened cattle when the camera's eye swung around to them and Herman turned his clicking crank. It reminded them of a machine gun—and they knew all about machine guns from the Younghusband mission.

But they could shout like bulls and rush together in bearish scrimmages. Fierce howls do not sound on a screen; but they registered well, and the scrimmages could be used to glorious effect in the scenes where the martyred Squirrel was kidnaped and rescued and kidnaped again.

It was after one of these that she came to the director, faint and nauseated.

"Mr. Crandal," she began, "I'm not hysterical or finnicky, am I? I don't mind being pulled about and rolled on; and I've never complained before, but this is positively the worst stunt you've ever given me. Those men are—they——"

Tracy joined them, his nose wrinkling

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offendedly, and supplied the description over which the Squirrel hesitated.

"I know what you want to say," he barked rebelliously. "They're filthy. They stink across all eternity. You know I'm strong for standing by the company for the sake of a good picture, Crandal, but this is outside of the limit. I don't believe any of those animals has washed or changed his clothes in a year."

"Wash?" Holly derided the idea. "Let me tell you that Tibetans don't ever wash; the climate isn't conducive to hygiene. But they compromise by getting themselves searched every now and then. However, you've got no call to kick, Tracy. Listen to what happened to your Uncle Jim for the sake of this picture. Two nights ago was pretty cold, wasn't it? A darn sight too cold for any fresh-air siesta, without even a blanket. Well, where d'you think I passed the night? In a Tibetan hut, hermetically sealed. No, I didn't sleep."

Thus was rebellion averted. After that nobody could complain.

In the afternoon the confusion was still further complicated by the arrival of a stout, little, dark man, who immediately made one think of coconut-oil, or some other greasy cooking medium. He seemed confused at first by the unrecognizable make-ups, and addressed himself first to Holly, as the only apparent white man in sight. The latter took stock of him with disapproval; he was not prepossessed in favor of officials at the best of times.

"Wrong call," he grunted. "That ruffianly-looking *kazi* over there is the manager."

The dark man almost paled, and hurried to Crandal.

"But—but where—where is Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"He had a slight accident," explained Crandal glibly. "Fell off his horse and broke a couple of legs and a few ribs and things. He was unable to come."

"But—but I had an arrangement with him to——"

It was clear that the man's agitation was not on Fitzgerald's personal account.

"Yes, that's all right, Mr. Dass-Mehra," Crandal soothed him. "I have the money with me, right here."

The relief in the fat face was ludicrous.

"Oah, I see. You are his manager, yes? That is all right then. I just came to see if he had brought—that is to say, if you had any trouble passing Chumbi. No? That is all right. I am verree pleased to have been of assistance." The babu rubbed his hands together and showed all his teeth. "You will excuse me now, yes? I will now go to the *dak-bungaloo* for a little tiffin, and— This is your leading lady? Oah my, what a most charming picture." He looked at her in nauseating admiration; and then suddenly remembered to sweep off his hat in a dumpy bow. "Er—you will excuse me now, yess? Er, I will come back later."

"Unwholesome little spider, ain't he?" Holly appraised sourly. "See him look at the Squirrel? Isn't he hot for the shekels, though!" Then a flash of his customary humor came into his face. "Holy Geel I'd like to see him hop, if he knew just how much assistance he's been to the Motioscopes. Hope de doesn't carry out his threat of coming back."

But the babu disappointed him. He came back with a positively gushing affability and contrived to establish unfriendly relations with the rest of the camp with celerity and despatch. He walked all over the white canvas screen on the ground and muddied it up, to the unspeakable rage of Herman, who cherished everything appertaining to his art as sacred. Then he harassed Crandal with useless questions.

But Holly jealously noticed that he only required information when the Squirrel was being instructed in her part. Then he scuttled back to Herman, and narrowly escaped with his life for butting into the dark-room tent while the latter was developing out a test-piece of eighteen inches or so from the tail of a reel of film to see whether the exposure had been correct.

He apologized for his error; but there was a vindictiveness behind his ready smile which even Herman noticed. He was a little subdued, however, and went slinking off behind the other tents. Here he suddenly stopped. Sounds indicated occupancy of one of them. A voracious look came into his eyes, and he tiptoed nearer. There was an opening in the lacing, but it was at least five feet six inches from the ground. He looked around cautiously, and then strained himself over a large stone and placed it beneath the slit.

Then out of the silence behind him, a hand that felt like a steel gauntlet descended on the back of his neck. Another

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hooked itself into his belt and he was carried fifty yards before he was set down with a jolt and spun round to look into Holly's narrow slits of eyes thrust down on a level with his own.

"Animal!" growled Holly. "That was the lady's dressing-tent."

The babu backed away with a sudden fear of death before him; and then, when he found that he was not instantly slain, his courage, or rather the effrontery which he carefully nurtured in its stead, came back to him. He jumped flabbily up and down and insisted that he had been insulted in a thin scream which brought Crandal hurrying to the scene.

"You dirty little ground-spider," said Holly very slowly. "If I catch you crawling 'round there again I'll twist all your legs off."

The babu frothed at the mouth and raved incoherently about the honor of a high Government official in a way which would have made Crandal laugh if it had not been for a recollection of the man's capacity and power for obstruction. He soothed matters down as well as he might, and finally succeeded in effecting some sort of a patchy truce. But the babu was not easily mollified, and stamped off with querulous outbreaks of chatter like an angry marmoset.

Crandal looked after him with a troubled frown.

"Guess you did quite right, Jim," he said ruefully. "But that bulbous baccillus is going to make trouble, big trouble."

Holly grunted; and then, at the thought, his anger vanished and he straightened out his shoulders and ran his fingers through his hair and grinned.

THE episode ended the day's work and the series of "outsides." There remained only the great devil dance on the morrow. Herman hugged his boxes and prayed all night to a celluloid god for a steady light. He did not care so much how bright it was as long as it did not vary with passing clouds. Crandal was even more enthusiastic about this greatest of all films and woke all his people up disgracefully early to repair to the scene, though Herman was the only one he really needed, and nothing was due to happen till the afternoon, anyhow.

Crowds of Lamas were already collected around the great artificial flat where the ceremony was to take place.

"Gosh, what a mob of 'em!" marveled Crandal.

"Huh, there are more Lamas than people in Tibet," Holly informed him. "But they have to wash during their initiation ceremony," he added irrelevantly.

Suddenly a great drum boomed with startling reverberation from one side of the circle. It was answered about a minute later by another from the opposite side. And then another from another quarter; and others took it up at lessening intervals till several hundred seemed to be combining to produce a continuous thunder that rose and fell in wonderfully timed waves to the accompaniment of a low, droning chant.

This was kept up without ceasing for the rest of the day. And the incessant quiver in the air became most irritating to the white men's ears; to all, that is to say, except Holly and the Squirrel, who seemed to be too much absorbed about something to take notice.

Presently the political officer in charge of Tibetan affairs arrived to grace the scene, accompanied by his full escort of twenty-five Gurkhas. He returned Crandal's greeting sulkily and took his seat in his appointed place without further conversation. But Crandal was not left to grieve for very long. A commotion was apparent at one side, and a venerable and richly dressed old gentleman entered, accompanied by about fifty Lamas of the Gold Seal.

"That's the Teshi Lama," whispered Holly. "This is unusual luck. Better let Herman reel off a strip on him—and then it's going to begin."

The Teshi was much gratified and a little frightened at the honor.

No sooner was this over when the drums rose to a booming roar, and a group of Lamas got up in fantastic masks, representing all the fiends and mythological beasts that primitive minds could imagine, broke through the circle from all sides and commenced a wild dance, which consisted of trying to annihilate one another. They fought as they imagined that devils might fight in Hades.

"This'll go on all day," Holly told Herman. "Take your time and cover only the best bits."

But the caperings and whirlings were so extraordinary that Herman soon filled a

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reel and went off to develop out his test-strip.

"How'd she run?" asked Crandal.

"Perfect!" beamed Herman.

Another company of Lamas made up in pairs as animals in papier-mâché masks and skins which would have made a stage property-man swear with envy, now entered and chased the devils off, and indulged in a dance of allegorical meaning, imitating the natural actions of the animals they represented with wonderful accuracy. Later the devils came back and a tremendous battle raged between them. Herman settled down more steadily now and got some short strips which put him into ecstasy.

After several hours of amazing performance, Crandal thought that he had enough to electrify New York and asked Herman how he stood with his film.

"Just about fifty feet left, Chief. The best I ever took."

"Well, I guess that'll do. I feel like some dinner," said Crandal.

From the other side of the circle the babu saw his preparations for departure and immediately came hurrying around.

"You have finished, Mr. Crandal?" he began with suspicious silkiness. "And now —as per arrangement, yess?" he grinned ingratiatingly.

"Wonder what mischief he's got at the back of that?" thought Holly, as Crandal carefully counted out an endless procession of ten-rupee notes. He was not left wondering long.

"And that is all right," the high Government official said, as he concealed the thick roll about his person without visibly increasing the flabby surface anywhere. "Now I will ask of you, my dear Mr. Crandal, just fifteen hundred rupees—er, bonus to cover the unpleasantness and insult which I have been subjected to."

Crandal staggered. Holly was the first to recover himself.

"Holy Pete!" he gasped. "It's a hold-up. Why you two cents of dog-meat, I'll bust you open and take the whole blame lot back."

"Oah, you are verree valiant, I know," grinned the babu, with the certainty of power behind him. "But what can you do against my whole armed escort? I can have you all arrested, and—" here he grinned with demoniac cunning— "and furthermore confiscate all your films. It is much better to pay."

The thing had been craftily planned, and the bodyguard was very evidently waiting for instructions. It was hopeless. Crandal, like a mother, was willing to save his precious film at any cost. Nothing else mattered. He restrained the frenzied Holly from falling upon the man and reached into a seemingly inexhaustible wallet. Then suddenly Holly kicked him quietly on the ankle.

"How do we know you won't grab the film anyhow, before we can get out of your —— jurisdiction?"

"Oah, you can do what you like with your film afterward. You can give them to a runner and start him off for the border immediately, from this verree place."

Holly pretended to consider, though it was just what he had angled for the babu to suggest.

"Very well then, you write out a pass for him to get through Chumbi without hindrance. Right here, you boggle-eyed tree-sloth. I wouldn't trust you——"

"It is verree easy to increase the bonus for insult," the babu reminded him viciously.

Crandal hastily took him by the arm and besought him to control himself. Holly seemed to be having a struggle.

"All right then," he grumbled. "You fix it with him. If I stay any longer I'll split him in halves."

With that Holly walked away and joined Herman, who never left his machine when strange mobs were around.

Crandal with reluctant precision counted out fifteen hundred rupees more to the leering babu. That made just two thousand dollars in all. The film was certainly worth far more than that; but it was the robbery that ate into his soul.

"Take him away," called Holly when it was over. "Gimme the pass, and I'll help Herman with the reels and start our best marathon champ before that pirate makes another grab."

THE babu grinned triumphantly and allowed himself to be led off. He proceeded, feeling very pleased with himself, to the rest-house; and there, though he had just left a scene of strife, he found an upheaval that drove the other out of his mind in comparison.

A huge man had just arrived and was raging up and down the floor like a rogue

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elephant, alone and on the verge of madness. He snatched up the bewildered babu and shook him into hiccoughing exhaustion.

"Swindle me, you miserable little nigger, would you!" he shouted at last when he had slammed him down.

"Who? What? Mr. Fitzgerald—I thought that you had broken your arms and things—they told me——"

"Broken, you fool! Do I feel broken? Who told you? Who's they?"

"Why, your manager who came and took the pictures for you!"

"Pictures! Arr-r-gh! Who took pictures?"

At this juncture Crandal entered. The babu pointed weakly at him. Fitzgerald opened his mouth in a husky bellow; and then something caught in his throat and he choked and sat down more soberly, breathing stertorously. But he glared hell and death.

The babu explained long-windedly, with circumstance and detail to exonerate himself.

Crandal perked his lean head on one side as each accusation was brought home and nodded cheerfully, like a winning gamecock. Fitzgerald's rage began to climb again. His breathing was better. He rose heavily and advanced growling upon Crandal, who never flinched.

A diversion was caused by Holly, who came in whistling happily through his teeth. He took in the situation in a second and his grin widened.

"'Lo, Fitz!" he shouted cordially. "Got here at last? That bloomin' spoke you had ready to slip into our bally wheel kinder tripped you up, didn't it? What d'you think of my own patent pack-knots?"

Fitzgerald turned from Crandal and looked at Holly with bulging eyes.

"That man—that is the man who has done it all!" shrilled the babu. "That is the one to thrash. For me too—please."

Then Fitzgerald understood and rushed at Holly, berserk.

Some stocky pugilist has achieved distinction by saying, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." Fitzgerald's whirling arms violently smote nothing. His impetus carried him forward and he felt three powerful concussions in the rear, which added just the necessary velocity to his own momentum to hurtle him stunned and breathless over a low table into a corner of the room, where he lay and slowly began to realize that he had been severely kicked.

Holly turned quietly to the babu.

"So, my little scorpion," he said pleasantly, as he twined his fingers into the paralyzed Aryan's collar, "you would urge your betters to thrash me, huh? I will therefore give myself the pleasure of slapping you." And he did, most scientifically.

Crandal finally succeeded in restraining him, horrified.

"Our film!" he gasped. "He'll grab it."

Holly grinned reassuringly.

"Chief, the bulge is with me. What d'you think I made that virtuous indignation play out on the field just now for? Just you take a front seat and watch this chameleon change color."

He addressed the babu again with soothing softness.

"And now *Babuji*, we'll talk a little business." He produced a short strip of film from his pocket, still wet. "Do you know what this is, *Babuji*? It's a test-strip from the last of a reel. If you look closely you will see that it represents a toad-shaped high Government official taking graft in ten-rupee notes. I have just fifty feet of that film, already on its way to the border by a fast runner with a personal pass signed by the acting political officer in charge of Tibetan affairs. Just the scene of that last fifteen-hundred-rupee hold-up, *Babuji*. You shouldn't have been such an extortionate snake."

The babu saw, and he shook in Holly's grasp. His whole career, past service and prospect of pension, could be blasted by that damnatory film.

"I'll sell you that film," said Holly with biting clearness, "for just two thousand dollars spot cash, in ten-rupee notes. You'll get the film as soon as I can mail it to you. Is it a trade?"

The babu never hesitated an instant.

"Many thanks, *Babuji*," said Holly with exaggerated politeness, and he suddenly let go the prisoner's collar, so that he dropped to the floor inert, like a spineless jelly-fish.

Holly turned to the still dazed Fitzgerald.

"And that, by the way, my dear Fitz, if you care to work it out, comes to just forty dollars a foot. I, as you have observed before, am a bally foreigner; and—you've been kicked already."

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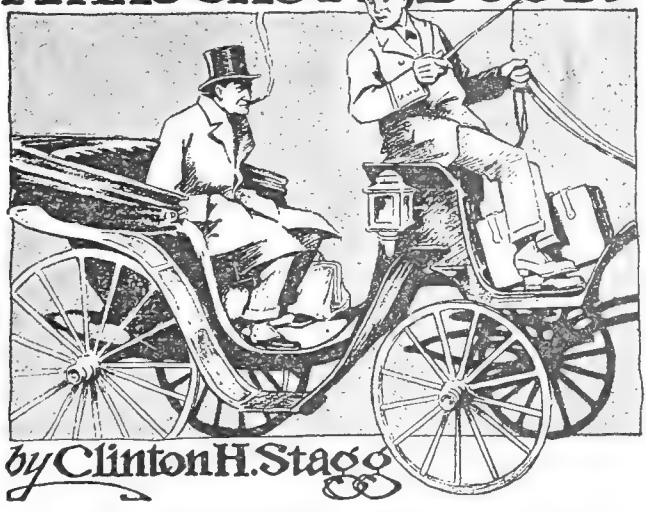
A Knock's A Boost



by Clinton H. Stagg

Author of "Peter Knowles Retires," "The Resurrection Pedler."

GERALD K. SIMPSON was a booster. He could make a man feel as important as an obituary on the first page of a war extra. He could make a town that didn't have a cellar under the city hall sneer at the New York subway system. He could make a woman go home and cry because Mrs. Peters, in the next house, hadn't been able to get a hundred dollar bonnet instead of the twenty-seven-fifty kind she bravely flaunted. As a booster he was supreme—the *n*th power.

Cities were his specialty. He usually came about three weeks after that ringing speech delivered at the annual banquet of the Board of Trade by Cyrus Towel, the bath-tub manufacturer. It was Cyrus's pleasure to throw sharp-pointed poo-poos at New York, Chicago and San Francisco. It was Gerald K's business to make 'em hit.

A friendly barman in a café on the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway, New York, put Ralston on Mr. Simpson's map. The barman declared that it was the greatest city in the world. It had a bank, two hotels, a big department store and ten manufacturing plants. That looked good to Mr. Simpson. He had never heard of Ralston before, and it was his business to remedy just such defects. Gerald K. had spent two months around the white lights and it was time he got back to work.

Ralston, according to the railroad ticket-man, was twenty-one dollars and sixty-eight cents west of New York. Pullman five dollars and meals a la carte. Gerald K. packed his grip full of clean sox, collars and past performances, and started to wake Ralston into believing it was the greatest little town on earth. When twenty dollars and ninety-five cents had been torn off his ticket Mr. Simpson changed cars for the last leg of the journey.

In the smoker Mr. Simpson lighted a fifty-cent cigar and sized up the conductor as he came down the aisle. He looked intelligent enough to answer an intelligent question. Gerald K. asked it.

"What kind of a town is Ralston?" he queried as he handed back the railroad's balance of seventy-three cents.

The conductor jabbed the ticket into his pocket.

"It's one station this side of the State Insane Asylum," he enlightened.

"Ah!" smiled Gerald K. in appreciation, tinged with just the slightest bit of friendly interest. "You live there, I presume?"

"Not me!" growled the conductor almost viciously. "I live in Bloomfield."

"That has a pleasant sound," commended Mr. Simpson. "Thriving little municipality, I suppose."

The conductor gripped his ticket-punch

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threateningly and queer sounds came from his lips. Then he spoke.

"Not by a —— sight! It's the rottenest town in the world! It's water is poison! It's mayor is a thief we got outta jail to elect! The street-cars are full of germs. The city hall is fallin' to pieces. No wagon's been able to get through the mud on Main Street for nine years! The railroad service is punk! There ain't a hotel in the place a man could go without catchin' small-pox! The death rate's the highest in the world, an' the women are so homely they have to wear muzzles to keep from bitin' themselves!"

He stopped with a panted oath and slapped his punch into his pocket.

"That's why I live there! That's why we all live there! If it wasn't that way we'd move. We like it. We love it! Last week we found out that an alderman wasn't a grafter an' we slung him outta the place!"

"Sweet little burg," observed Mr. Simpson speculatively. If Ralston held material as promising as this it would be a job after his own heart. Then Bloomfield afterward. Boosting was contagious. One town got it and then another caught it. "I think I'll drop in and look it over soon," he confided.

"Leave your pocketbook behind," warned the conductor sourly. "The crooks are so thick there the two honest old women sleep in the jail."

"I guess not," grinned Gerald K. He liked that conductor. The kind that sneered the hardest always made the best boosters. "I'll give you people a jolt of local pride sometime," he promised. "That's my business. I show towns how to show other people. I'm going up to Ralston to teach 'em to boost themselves."

The conductor held out his hand.

"Twenty cents," he grunted.

"What's the idea?" puzzled Mr. Simpson.

"Extra fare to the station beyond Ralston. It's the asylum you want."

"Can't be done, eh?" chuckled Gerald K.

"Aw ——!" snarled the conductor in sudden uncalled-for wrath. "Hope you like Ralston," he pitied, as he started down the aisle.

Mr. Simpson puffed his cigar confidently. He'd seen people who doubted his abilities before.

"They've probably hated themselves since their mothers let 'em pick out their own shoes," decided Gerald K. with the light of coming battle in his eyes. "I'll make 'em think Chicago's only something to keep the lake from slopping over the shore!"

The conductor passed through that car a number of times, and he pitied the booster every time he went by. It began to make Mr. Simpson nervous. When a railroad conductor pities a man he needs it. Gerald K. chewed at his fifty-cent cigar, evidence that he was thinking, and didn't care how much it cost. The conductor made his announcement of Ralston as a sort of growled oath. On his way through the car he stopped at Mr. Simpson's seat.

"See you in Bloomfield, soon" he said with the air of a lodge brother. "Remember, we got the rottenest town in the world. Folks are so mean they won't let the birds light. Say they wear out the fences settin' on 'em."

"I'm going to like Ralston," prophesied Gerald K. "Will I see you if I happen to be in Bloomfield?"

"Sure, if you make it between this train and the ten-fifty at night. I'm in town then. I'm mayor."

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Simpson, remembering the statement regarding the man they pulled out of jail to elect. "Oh!"

"That's what they all say," scowled the conductor. "Take a good swig outta your flask. Here's Ralston."

MR. GERALD K. SIMPSON picked up his bag and swaggered down the aisle. He always swaggered into a new town. It showed the natives what boosting could do for a man. The train came to a stop in a neat, up-to-date station. At one end of the concrete platform a group of men and boys talked excitedly. Good sign. Men who argued were the best booster material in the world. Mr. Simpson patted himself on the back as he saw the good looking street and buildings. The stage was all set. It only needed the germ to make these people appreciate the things they saw every day.

As he swung down the steps a hackman, who was bigger and broader than any white-hope Mr. Simpson had ever seen, took his grip.

"Glad to see you," he grinned. "Goin' to be in town long?"

Mr. Simpson's swagger became more pronounced. He never wasted time.

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"I expect to be here some little while," he informed. "Which is the best hotel?"

The cabman deposited the bag on the front seat of his rig.

"The Great Western's the best hotel in the world!" he declared enthusiastically.

"Fine!" exclaimed Mr. Simpson. This man would make a tip-top booster with a little practise. "Me for that."

"Ralston House is the best in the city, though," amended the driver, watching the small group of men and boys who were coming down the platform toward him. "Ain't a hotel like it nowhere. Course, in any other city the Great Western would be a wonder. But it don't amount to shucks here. Looka that street!" He pointed dramatically. "It's so smooth the cops have to keep people from cuttin' pockets in it to play pool. Looka them street-cars! Never known to be late!"

"Hey, Dan!" The call came from the group that edged Mr. Simpson aside as it surrounded the cabman. "This guy says our city-hall steeple ain't as high as some of the buildin's in New York."

"That's a joke," sneered the hunch-shouldered stranger in the center of the crowd.

The cabman spoke to Dave.

"Scuse me a minute," he apologized.

When he turned to face the group his fist started somewhere in the general location of his hip and landed on the sneerer's jaw. The stranger accepted it without comment.

"Wait till the next train comes in an' throw water in his face," suggested the cabman. "They fill the tanks at Clairmont. No use wastin' good town water that way." He remembered his customer, then. "We got the finest water in the world!" he enthused. "We had to get out a 'junction to keep a man from bottling it an' sellin' it in New York for champagne. Hop in! I'll take you to the Ralston. What's your business?"

Mr. Simpson looked at the cabman. He looked at his bag on the seat. He gazed at the train which was fading in the distance. He watched the men bear away the limp form of the sneering stranger. Then he answered.

"I'm retired," he choked.

"Best place in the world for that!" averred the hack-driver, climbing in. "Death rate's the lowest there is. Taxes is two-point-five. You want to meet our mayor. Most honest man alive. Gid-ap! Looka that horse! Bred right here in town, on the grass we grow. Most nootricious stuff on earth."

Mr. Simpson lighted another cigar. He needed it.

"Looka that park!" The driver stopped to point out the square of green. "Ain't nothin' like it nowhere. Listen to them birds. They come from miles around jest to sing in them trees. Wait a minute, there's our mayor. Hey, your Honor!"

The tall, cadaverous man with the rusty black suit that hung on him like a flannel shirt on a line stopped and smiled.

"Stranger, gonna stop with us," informed the cabman.

His Honor hurried out with hand extended. Gerald K. braced up. He always liked to meet the town officials. He assured himself that his vest set smoothly over his wide chest, that his eyes glowed brightly; and his fat fingers touched the smooth, healthy roundness of his cheeks as he removed the cigar from his lips.

"Glad to meet you!" he greeted heartily. "My name's Simpson."

"He's retired an' comin' here for a rest," put in the cab-driver.

His Honor bowed gravely.

"This town will make a new man of you," he promised. "You do look a bit run down. The air here is incomparable, sir! Marvelous! You won't know yourself in a week. I've been here fourteen years. Rent a little house and live among us. It will do wonders for you. I want to see you tonight at the combination social session of the Ralston Booster's Club, the Civic Pride Association and the Industrial Betterment League. We'll see that you have a good time!"

"That's what I tol' him!" chuckled the driver. The answer probably fitted in somewhere, but Gerald K. couldn't get his thoughts around to figure it out.

"Glad to have met you. Thanks," smiled Mr. Simpson, and that smile hurt his ears. They wanted to lay back while he growled.

"Ain't he a wonder?" laughed the driver, when his Honor had started on and the horse was moving once more. "Wanta drive 'round an' see the Deef an' Dumb Asylum? Most complete institution on earth."

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The temptation was great but Mr. Simpson thrust it aside.

"No," he said. "I'll go right to the hotel. I'm tired."

"That's best, I guess," nodded the driver. "You do look fagged. Ain't nothin' like them Ralston House beds. Here we are. Looka that entrance! Improvement on the big cathedral in Rome. Simmons, our architect here, done it. Whoa!"

Simpson climbed out of the hack. A bell-hop, a porter and a man with white whiskers that had importance curled in every hair hurried out. The bell-boy beat the porter by an inch and got the bag. The porter spread both hands wide to cleave a passage through the air for the guest. The manager held out his hand.

"Glad to see you!" he cried enthusiastically. "Glad to see you!"

"His name's Simpson," informed the cabman. "He's a retired business man. Run-down. Needs a rest. Goin' to stay here till he gets his health."

"Too bad you waited so long before coming to Ralston," pitied the hotel man. "But it's never too late to mend. Got the best room in the house waiting for you. I'll have a boy right up there to run you a cold bath."

He was leading Mr. Simpson by the arm into the lobby. He stopped the running fire of words to give the clerk a chance.

"New guest," he announced. "Retired capitalist. Run-down. Needs a rest. Mr. Simpson."

"Lucky you struck the right place, Mr. Simpson!" commended the clerk as he spun the register, put a pen in the guest's hand and pointed out the line. "I'll hustle the ice-water right up. The evening papers'll be along in a couple of hours. There's two new magazines out today. One ain't much, printed in New York somewhere, but the other's the monthly report of the Civic Pride Association. Great stuff. Front!"

Mr. Simpson was led to the elevator. He was silent, very silent. The elevator-man stopped the car and slid open the gate.

"Here's your floor, Mr. Simpson. Notice how smooth this car stops? Made right here in the city."

"This way, sah!" The bell-boy hadn't had a chance before, but he got into the conversation as he ran up the shades and set Mr. Simpson's bag gently at the foot of the bed. "Here's yo' room. Best in the house. Jes' look how that carpet's laid. My pa done that! He's the champeen carpet-layer of the country. Lives right here in Ralston. Anything else?"

"No!"

Gerald K. Simpson sank into a chair. He was gasping fishily. The front of his vest waved back and forth. Another bell-boy was running his bath. A knock on the door meant ice-water. The new bell-boy announced that it was real Ralston water he brought. Mr. Simpson growled in his throat. The bell-boys looked at him pityingly and went out. Ashes from the fifty-cent cigar dropped on Gerald K.'s vest. In his pocket was nine dollars and forty cents. New York was twenty-one dollars and sixty-eight cents away. Pullman five dollars and meals a la carte.

"R-r-r-r-r-r!" he growled.

He paced the most perfectly laid carpet in the best room of the finest hotel in Ralston.

"I want an easy job!" he groaned. "Like selling salt to the ocean, or peddling headaches along Broadway. Me a booster! Good night! Page T. Roosevelt, please!"

Outside the window a hundred Ralston birds twittered happily in Ralston trees.

"Come for miles around!" he choked. "Shoo!" he waved his arms and they all chirped cheerfully. "Shut up!" he snarled. He had to snarl at something. "It's a —— of a town!" he announced to get it out of his system.

"*Tweet-tweet!*" sang the birds. "Ralston! Ralston! Ralston!"

The telephone bell rang. Simpson ground his teeth. He looked for something to throw at the birds.

"Hello," called the voice of the clerk. "Don't hesitate to make any request whatever. This is Ralston, you know!"

For seconds Mr. Simpson had some strange trouble with his throat.

"*Twitter-twitter-twitter!*" came from a bird on the window-sill.

"Nothing?" cooed the clerk in disappointment.

"Yes!" yelled Simpson. "Make these —— birds stop their noise! I'm nervous."

"Certainly, sir," replied the clerk, who was on earth merely to give visitors in Ralston anything they wanted. He spoke soothingly to the retired capitalist who was run-down and needed a rest. "Yes sir, I'll have the manager take it right up with God!"

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II

IT WAS gala night in Ralston. The regular monthly meeting of the combined Ralston Booster Club, the Civic Pride Association and the Industrial Betterment League was in session. It was a social session. There were cigars for every one and sandwiches would be served with the coffee.

Hiram Appleton, who manufactured Brussels carpets and let the war advertise his business, untangled his beard from the top button of his vest.

"They tell me there's a visitor in town?" He sought confirmation of John T. Briggs, the man who owned the finest elevator works in the world.

"Yes," nodded Mr. Briggs. "That's him over there with Hollister. Retired capitalist. Run-down. Needs a rest. Name's Simpson."

"He certainly was most fortunate to strike this town," remarked T. Lawrence Langdon, who owned the greatest department store on earth. "There is nothing like it to build a man up."

"Or his business," chorused John T. and Hiram, with the ease of much practise.

T. Lawrence, who was very dapper, smoothed his Bulgarian tie.

"My business increased thirty-one per cent. last season. I'm going to open a branch."

"I gotta build, too," grunted Hiram. "That south-east factory of mine, 'joinin' your property, John, is the best buildin' in the world. Wouldn't sell it for any price. But I need another."

"I'm going to build a small addition, too," proudly proclaimed John T. "That whole four-story L of mine is chock-a-block with stored goods. After a while there won't be any place in my plant for construction work. This town surely is a wonder. Sh! Here comes Hollister with Mr. Simpson. He does look peeked."

Mr. Simpson, his chest sunken a bit, and in his eyes a queer, hunted expression, was being piloted by the genial and hard-working proprietor of the Ralston House. Mr. Simpson had met one hundred and twelve of Ralston's progressive men. He had heard two hundred and twenty-four boosts. Two to a man is very conservative, but that's the kind of story this is. Mr. Simpson felt that he answered perfectly the description that had been tagged on him. He *was* retired. He was a back number.

"Meet Mr. Simpson," exhibited Hollister, leading Gerald K. gently forth. "Retired capitalist. Run-down. Came here for a rest. Lives in New York."

Mr. Appleton, Mr. Briggs and Mr. Langdon all arose. They were very glad to meet Mr. Simpson. He was welcome to the best city in the world. Would he have a cigar or did he prefer to wait until the coffee and sandwiches had been served? The air, of which Ralston at present had the sole available supply, would soon fix him up. Of course he hadn't seen enough of the city to properly appreciate it but he had no doubt heard much of their thriving municipality in New York. It was even said that New York compared quite favorably with Ralston in some minor respects. Yes. Of course the ocean was a draw-back, being so close that way. The city couldn't enjoy the remarkable healthful dryness that favored Ralston. But they had heard many nice things said of the eastern metropolis. Really!

"Excuse me a minute," apologized Hollister. "I want to talk with Schnediker. Think I'll have a new coat of paint in my dining-room. Don't need it, that Ralston House is the finest building in the world, but I've got to keep up things. These gentlemen will see that you enjoy yourself."

"Go right ahead," Mr. Simpson gave permission, with something like a sigh of relief. He had been with Hollister for two hours.

"We're glad to make visitors happy," grinned Hiram. Then with a nod toward the departing hotel-man, "He certainly has got a fine place, ain't he?"

Mr. Simpson drew a deep breath and prepared to answer. But he wasn't quick enough.

"Wonder!" exclaimed Mr. Briggs. "I guess that hotel building, outside of my four-story L, is one of the best pieces of construction work in the city."

"That's right, John," corroborated T. Lawrence Langdon. "Simmons built it just four years before he planned that main store of mine. He's the greatest living architect!"

Gerald K.'s teeth gritted together with a peculiar grinding sound. Yes, he would be entertained. He had been lavishly entertained ever since he struck Ralston. Finest

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buildings! Greatest architect! Run-down! Needed a rest! *He did!*

"You bet!" agreed Mr. Appleton.

"It surely is an education for a man just to look at the buildings we have in this town!" announced Mr. Briggs, eying the long golden hair on Mr. Langdon's coat. Mrs. Langdon's hair was white.

"Sure is!" averred Hiram, glancing mildly at John T's cigar.

"Do you good to see them!" informed T. Lawrence, apologizing for kicking Mr. Appleton's shin. "A business man can not afford to overlook things that might help him."

"No," muttered the man who had overlooked Ralston for so many years. "No."

Simultaneously the same idea struck three minds. They had shown woful lack of hospitality. They had not asked the retired capitalist just what form of capitalism had been his preference before he was run-down. A man always liked to talk business—his business—and these leading citizens of Ralston really had no idea what Mr. Simpson's business had been.

John T. Biggs arrived first.

"Railroad man?" he asked politely. "Those railroad buildings down at Fourth and Dolliver ought to interest you."

The ashes from Mr. Simpson's cigar dropped down his neck. That was because he had bitten through his cigar. The subject pained him. There wasn't a train out of town till morning. He had looked it up.

"If you're int'rested in banks you ought to see our First National," suggested Hiram Appleton. "Most complete bankin' structure in the world!"

Mr. Simpson smiled a smile that pulled his ears forward. It was the show-down. He had to come across with something. And he did.

"I came here for a rest," he said slowly. "I picked out the one place on earth where I couldn't possibly do business."

"Yes?" queried Ralston's three citizens encouragingly.

Mr. Simpson ground his teeth once more. His chin pulled the folds of fat up from his collar. He plunged.

"Yes," he parroted. "I buy old, worn-out, dilapidated buildings that are falling to pieces and wreck 'em for scrap! I can't do a stroke of business in this up-to-date, wonderful, thriving municipality. That's why I came here."

"That's so," remarked Mr. Briggs thoughtfully.

"You certain'y showed good judgment," observed Mr. Appleton, puffing meditatively on his cigar.

"Ralston's certainly a great town," declared Mr. Langdon, tapping his chair-arm with his manicured fingers. "Ah! Here come the sandwiches, Mr. Simpson. Do you prefer ham or Swiss cheese?"

"Swiss cheese!" gulped Gerald K., offering up a prayer that Switzerland be spared from the untoward events which now beset Europe.

That ham was probably a Ralston product. It was. Mr. Simpson met the man who owned the most succulent and tender pigs in the world. He met a lot of other men, too. He also ate a great number of Swiss cheese sandwiches. Not because he liked them, but he had once read of a man who had been poisoned by eating imported Swiss cheese. That's how happy Mr. Gerald K. Simpson felt.

At eleven o'clock he shook hands with sixty-seven leading citizens and received two earsful of sympathetic murmurs regarding his run-down condition. Then Hollister, whose business it was to look after guests, took him home in a hack.

"Great town!" enthused Hollister. "Fine speech the mayor made, wasn't it?"

"Wonderful!" choked Mr. Simpson, who was smoking steadily in a vain effort to get the taste of Swiss cheese from the roof of his mouth.

"A bit too modest in spots, I thought," deplored the hotel man. "Some of our less progressive citizens are talking of another candidate this fall. Ben Henshaw is very conservative. Nobody would ever take him to be worth a million."

"Yes!" swore Gerald K. as Hollister helped him to alight in front of the Ralston House. "Many guests?" he asked, wondering why some of the others didn't get some of the service.

The manager smiled.

"This is an off week. You're all alone, now. Be a houseful soon, though," he said proudly. "There always is."

"Oh," murmured Mr. Simpson as he stepped into the elevator. "Oh!" he repeated as he removed his coat in his room.

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He dropped into a chair and cursed the ultimate pifflishness of all things.

"Finest hotel in the greatest town in the world, with only one guest!" he snarled. "And he'll be gone in the morning! They'd have to hog-tie me to keep me in this town! Boosters! What they want is a good slam in the ear! I wonder if I can get that conductor to talk to me on the way down?" he murmured, and to the eyes that had been so weary and tired came a gleam of hope.

He took off one shoe. Then the telephone rang. He threw the shoe at the instrument and answered sleepily. It was Mr. Appleton who called. Could Mr. Simpson spare him just a moment? There was an important question he'd like to ask. Thanks. He'd be right up. The connection was broken.

"R-r-r-r-r!" growled Mr. Simpson at the dead mouthpiece. He had not had a chance to answer that first question of Mr. Appleton, the carpet manufacturer, who was now on his way up-stairs to ask another.

"*Would* it be murder?" asked Gerald K. softly, hefting the heavy shoe. But he sighed hopelessly as the door opened to admit Hiram.

MR. APPLETON smiled affably and closed the door gently behind him.

"I'll on'y keep you a minute," he apologized. "You do look tired an' run-down. It's about that business you're in. It int'rested me."

"Yes?" groped Mr. Simpson, momentarily forgetting just what business he had given as his own.

Hiram nodded, and the smile became more friendly.

"Bein' a stranger here I can talk quite free to you," he went on. "Of course, even if you're run-down you wouldn't run away from a little chance to do business and help out a friend, would you?"

"Certainly *not*," agreed Mr. Simpson.

"Here it is." Mr. Appleton slid his chair nearer and his voice became a confidential whisper. "I got a fact'ry buildin', southeast part of my main plant, that I can't use. It's the finest—" he caught himself— "it's all wore out an' I'd sell it to a man like you who would tear it down an' make a little profit."

Mr. Simpson grabbed a fleshy part of his own arm between a thumb and forefinger. He was still conscious.

"I couldn't hardly do it myself," explained Mr. Appleton. "Mightn't be understood, you understand. A lot of my friends think I ought to be mayor next term, and it'd look bad if I started to tear down a buildin' of mine. But a stranger could do it, an' I'd be glad to buy the property back. Business is business!" he winked.

A gasp escaped Gerald K.'s lips. It looked as if Ralston had boosted itself a little too well. A man didn't even tear down his own building because that would be an open confession that it wasn't one of the best in the world. But it would be perfectly safe for a stranger to come in and do it, bear the brunt of popular indignation, and get out.

"What's your price?" stalled Gerald K. The present Mr. Appleton was a relief. He kicked his own stuff.

"Twelve thousand," sighed Hiram, "an' I'd buy the land back for eight."

"After you'd become properly indignant at my desecration," figured Mr. Simpson.

"He! He!" chuckled Hiram. "That's it. I sell my buildin'. You tear it down, and I come in an' make you sell the land back. The whole town knows I'm protectin' its interests, then. It's three-story, two hundred and thirty by seventy, elevators an' a sprinkler system."

Mr. Simpson's eyes widened. Hiram *was* anxious to have that building torn down. Mayor of Ralston must be a good job.

"I'll think about it," he decided, "and let you know tomorrow. Mail me an option so I'll get it first thing in the morning. Like things right."

"Sure," promised Hiram, rising. Then he sighed again. "I wisht that north wing of John Briggs's place wasn't so perfect. That's jest what I want. But bein' a careful business man I couldn't afford to pay him what it'd be worth. He'd want an awful price. I'm just going to slap together any kind of a place for myself."

"That's business," declared Mr. Simpson. "See you in the morning."

He watched Hiram go. Then he swore the same oath five times. Every time it meant something different. There came a knock at the door. He called. John T. Briggs cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder and slid in.

"Sorry to disturb you," he apologized.

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"But I want to talk business with you. Private business. I came up the stairs because there's no necessity of letting anyone know I'm here."

"Sit down," invited Gerald K.

Briggs did, very carefully.

"As a business man you wouldn't object to making your expenses here?" he hazarded.

"No. Have a cigar."

Mr. Simpson was beginning to like Mr. Briggs. He talked like a man planning a burglary.

"Thanks," murmured John T. "Now I've got the best—" he stopped, just as Hiram had when practise began to run away with his business sense—"I've got a wretched old four-story L that I can't use for anything but storing purposes and the insurance rates are so high I'm losing two or three thousand a year. I need the room for a modern, up-to-date structure. But I'm handicapped.

"We expect to put a new ticket into the campaign this Fall and my friends think that I should be mayor. Now, my action of tearing down the building might be misconstrued. It would be different, of course, for a stranger who made that his business. Though, of course, publicly I could not know of your intentions. But I would buy the land back."

"Good campaign stunt," murmured Mr. Simpson.

"Ah!" smiled Mr. Briggs. "You *are* a business man!"

Mr. Simpson nodded.

"How'd your price run on that?" he asked.

"Eighteen thousand. Cost fifty, sixteen years ago. I'd pay ten for the land alone." He arose with a sigh. "If that south-east factory wing of Hiram Appleton's wasn't such a bang-up place it would be just what I need," he mourned. "But I know his price would be sky-high. I've felt him out three or four times and I know I couldn't touch it. And sometimes I fear Mr. Appleton hasn't the interests of the city at heart. There's talk of his running for mayor."

Gerald K. nodded again.

"I'll let you know in the morning," he said. "Here, let me light your cigar. By the way," he added as an after-thought, "you might mail me an option. I like things in black-and-white."

The door closed behind Mr. Briggs and his earnest promise.

"Well I'm choked!" muttered Gerald K. "They had me going just as bad as they got themselves. The whole blamed town has kidded itself to sleep. It's boosted itself right into the upper berth."

The telephone jangled its summons and he answered it cheerfully. It was the hotel proprietor.

"Hate to bother you, being run-down and nervous like you are," he began apologetically. "But Mr. Langdon's here and he wants to know can he see you a minute? It seems you was interrupted right in the middle of a good story and he's anxious to hear the end of it."

"Send him right up," grunted Gerald K. genially, and he put on his shoe.

The dapper Mr. Langdon came into the room on his toes. He carefully closed the door.

"Mr. Simpson," he said softly, before his hand left the knob. "You are an angel from Heaven."

"Thanks," murmured Mr. Simpson. "Have a cigar?"

T. Lawrence took it and used it to gesture with.

"You dropped from heaven at the precise moment necessary to render me a signal service and at the same time make your rest here profitable." He paused impressively. "This town is wonderful, marvelous, supreme! It has only one draw-back! It has an unprogressive mayor! My friends seek my business ability and well known executive powers to remedy that defect!"

"Great!" applauded Mr. Simpson with shining eyes. "How much of a campaign contribution am I supposed to hand out."

"Nothing!" declared T. Lawrence earnestly. "My visit here tonight is business—your business!"

He let his audience puzzle over that for a minute. T. Lawrence Langdon knew that he was a finished orator with the trick of pausing at just the proper place. He continued:

"I have a small loft building that seriously interferes and menaces my store, Mr. Simpson. You are not thoroughly conversant with conditions in this city, so I will tell you that in the sides of Ralston there are several thorns that would use to criminal advantage any purely business or altruistic motive." He stopped, this time to give the mangled metaphor a chance to stagger to its feet. "But you—you could raze that building, get it out of way without comment.

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That is your business. I want you to purchase the building and raze it, leaving me the land free and clear. I will take any sum, so that you may have a good profit."

Mr. Simpson shook his head slowly.

"I always make it a point to buy outright any property to be razed," he informed. "It saves the possibility of lawsuits. Of course the land is of no value to me after the building has been wrecked and I would sell it back to you."

"Very proper!" commended Mr. Langdon.

Gerald K. yawned.

"I never close a deal after midnight," he hinted. "Will you mail me an option in the morning? There'll be no question, then."

"Certainly! Certainly!"

And Mr. T. Lawrence Langdon gave his Bulgarian tie a last final pat and hurried out.

Mr. Simpson rose from his chair. He snapped open his bag and laid his sox carefully in the dresser drawer. He smoothed out his ties and saw that his safety-razor was adjusted for morning.

"I'm going to like this town," he murmured a bit sleepily. "It's a darn poor salesman that hasn't something just as good. I've been a booster all my life and now I find that a knock's the thing. I'll just knock a little life into this town. Watch me!"

III

GERALD K. SIMPSON'S thoughts tiptoed softly around inside his head so that no one would know they were awake. They'd been doing that ever since Mr. Simpson's room-box had yielded its mail of three perfectly good options on three of the finest pieces of property in the greatest city in the world. The careful business men of Ralston had not waited until morning. They had only waited to get pen, ink and paper.

Business men were Gerald J. Simpson's business. And Mr. Simpson knew his business thoroughly. That's why the thoughts were tiptoeing. Years of experience had taught that when a business man is very anxious to run for office, that office has handed the ha-ha to politics and become a business proposition.

He looked at the options again and his careful mind tabulated them as items:

Hiram Appleton	$12,000
John T. Briggs	$18,000
T. Lawrence Langdon	$11,000

There persisted in Mr. Simpson's mind the thought that had come when Hiram had made his profitable offer.

Mayor of Ralston was a good job!

"I think I'll get a line on things," decided Gerald. "I may want to run myself."

He hurried down the main street toward the station and the movable bureau of information known as the local hackman. He found the cab-driver and that individual enthused a whole lot when Mr. Simpson hired his cab to look at the sights of the city.

"I been waitin' for you," he confided as he straightened the reins. "I was goin' to drive up and git you, but bein' run-down I knowed you want to sleep. Hear you ain't a business man, but a capitalist?"

"From the ground up," confirmed Mr. Simpson. "How's the cab business?" he joked. "Any chance to make a good investment?"

The cabman wagged his head and grinned knowingly.

"Can't forget work, can you? And the air here's already braced you up, ain't it?"

"I never overlook a bet," averred Gerald K. "Think I'll drop in an see the mayor this morning to get a line on local securities."

"He oughta know," observed the hackman. "He's a millionaire and one of our progressivest citizens."

"No doubt," sparred Simpson. "One of the people, too, I notice. Right with the common man every time."

"Well—" the hesitation in the driver's voice was marked—"he's a wonderful man, and his house is the finest in the country. But a mayor's job oughta be for a man that mixes with the people and knows the worker's side of things."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Simpson. "What ticket are you going to run on?"

"The labor ballot," answered the driver, passing a freshly painted lamp-post without showing it to his fare. "Of course, our mayor's a wonderful man, but bein' a millionaire kinda warps his idears on things. I hear Hiram Appleton's gonna run, too. He's all right, but he's got a barrel of money, too. I've been a laborin' man all my life. I saved, too."

"Hum," mused Mr. Simpson. "Sometimes a good mayorality candidate is a mighty fine investment."

He glanced with undisguised approval at the cabman.

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The cab-driver saw that, and he also saw that there was nothing against having a retired capitalist for a friend. He looked around and lowered his voice.

"You better see Mr. Langdon. Maybe he'll let you be one of my committee. When I'm mayor we're gonna buy the street-car lines and let the city run 'em."

"Oh!" Mr. Simpson closed his eyes so the sudden light wouldn't hurt them. No doubt the careful business men of Ralston all owned stock in the traction company. And the mayor would practically fix the selling and buying price when the company was made a municipal concern. "Oh," he repeated thoughtfully. "I might pick up a block."

"I don't know's you could," sorrowed the driver. "Mr. Langdon wants to get all us laborin' men in."

"Oh!" said Mr. Simpson again.

Dapper Mr. Langdon was kidding the voters into buying the stock so that he would have them solidly with him on the buying proposition. And they'd have to stay with him, too, if they wanted to make money. He'd announce his own candidacy when the stock had been placed in the hands of enough voters to insure their switch.

"Is that his department store?" asked Gerald K., as they neared a building which had T. Lawrence Langdon's name spread all over the front.

"Yes," confirmed the driver enthusiastically. "Finest in the world, but he's got the interests of the city plumb at heart. We're gonna put the new municipal trolley terminal there. He's gonna let the city have it for half a million. It's dirt cheap. There's a loft buildin' in back of that's gonna be my headquarters durin' the campaign. Mr. Langdon's a nice man."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Simpson, using his eyes.

The building was probably worth all of one hundred thousand dollars. Mayor of Ralston *was* a good job. He looked at the driver speculatively. So the building Mr. Langdon wanted razed was to be the labor candidate's headquarters. Fine!

"I haven't heard a word about that terminal proposition and the proposed municipal trolley lines before," he mused, plainly hurt at the oversight.

"Well," the driver apologized for his native city, "you see nobody knows it but Mr. Langdon and me. We're kinda keepin' it back for the big campaign issue. Next month I'm gonna spring it and have the Civic Pride endorse me."

"Good business," complimented Gerald K.

"Yes," nodded the driver. "It is. The Civic Pride Bulletin had a piece in it about municipal ownership of street-cars in other cities, and there's where me and Mr. Langdon got the idear. We ain't talkin' much about car lines."

Mr. Simpson felt the need of smoked glasses. The way that hackman was letting light into the world was hard on tender eyes. Gerald K. had further evidence that Ralston's chief boosters were all good business men. That story had slid a lot of minds into the same groove, and a lot of other thoughts were tip-toeing so they wouldn't wake any one up.

"Mr. Langdon certain'y is a nice man," repeated the hack-driver reverently, taking a last fond look at the corner of the loft building which showed as they went on. Gerald K. agreed again, this time silently.

"Where's Mr. Appleton's place?" he wanted to know, and the driver turned a corner so he could point it out.

"The war's certain'y a good thing for Ralston," he observed. "Hiram's sellin' a pile of carpets. It took the Kaiser to show people that Ralston stuff was a lot better than the imported."

"That's right," affirmed Mr. Simpson, thankful to know at last the real cause of the European trouble. It had all been staged merely to boost Ralston.

He looked at the big main building which housed the carpet-works. On the opposite side of the street was the John T. Briggs plant. At the south-east corner of Hiram's main structure was *the* building. The street was lined solidly with buildings. The street-car tracks took up the center of the street. Gerald K. saw what a nice, open space that razed building would leave. It would be where Ralston could see it every day. It would pop up before Ralston's eyes as the real ready site for a trolley terminal.

And Hiram Appleton, that progressive, interested citizen, would indignantly buy back the land from the man who dared to pull down a building! Then it would be a shame to let a fine piece of property like that stand idle; to show such a hole in Ralston's building front. Trolley terminal on Hiram Appleton's property. Hoo-ray!

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Yes, Mr. Simpson knew that Hiram was a business man after his own heart. Of course, *he* couldn't clear his own property. That would be too crude. And he probably owned a big block of the stock on which he, as mayor, could fix his price, also that logical piece of property on which proud Ralston could build its municipal trolley building.

"I think I'll drop off and see Mr. Appleton," decided Gerald K. as they came opposite the big gate.

"Course, what I told you was confidential," worried the driver.

Mr. Simpson climbed down carefully. Then he leaned over and spoke to the cabman as brother to brother.

"Listen," he said softly. "I'm going to make you mayor of this town. Hiram Appleton's a crook!"

The driver's chin fell so far that it threatened to roll down his vest front. But Mr. Simpson was in too much of a hurry to heed. He made straight for the offices of the Appleton Carpet Company.

OUTSIDE the door he paused a minute. This was to give his righteous indignation time to boil under his vest without spilling over. Then he pushed open the door and burst in. Three stenographers jumped up, but they weren't quick enough. Mr. Simpson saw a door marked PRIVATE and he slammed it open.

Hiram Appleton jumped to his feet with a squeal.

"Why—why—Mr. Simpson?" he gasped, frightened at the angry quivering of Gerald K's cigar.

Mr. Simpson impaled him on a sharp, glittering eye and spun him around on an outstretched forefinger.

"Mr. Appleton!" he said sharply.

"Yes sir," quavered Hiram because he couldn't help it.

"What impression did my conversation at the social meeting give you?" He did not wait for an answer. "Did I strike you as being a crook?" This time he gave Hiram a chance to catch up.

"Why—no—of course not!" stuttered Mr. Appleton.

"Ha!" grated Mr. Simpson. "Ha!" He ground his heel into the soft depths of an Appleton Brussels, Imperial Throne-room, No. 3. "Then why, why do I receive a crooked proposition from a man for whom I thought this town vouched, whose honesty as a citizen of this wonderful city I considered unimpeachable? Why? I ask you, why?"

"There ain't nothin' wrong with my opshun?" faltered Hiram nervously.

"The shoe does not fit you!" declared Gerald K. icily. "I came here merely to confirm my own idea regarding the impression my conversation last evening conveyed to an intelligent mind. Thank you."

"You're an honest man!" swore Hiram. "You're a credit to the city!"

Mr. Simpson jabbed his hand into his pocket.

"Then why," he demanded, "why does a supposed estimable citizen like John T. Briggs come to me with a proposition to tear down his L building so that the property may be vacant for a proposed municipal trolley terminal he is to build when elected mayor?"

Hiram staggered.

"Did he do that?" he flared.

Mr. Simpson nodded sulkily.

"With the proviso that we split up the profits. Of course I refused. But he gave me an option for eighteen thousand on the building. But that's where his crookedness shows!" Mr. Simpson panted. "On the face of this option he has made it for both building and property. He is to buy back the property from me so that he will not appear in this original transaction. If I made it public he would laugh at me! He would swear that he had sold me both the property and the building at a nominal price. And no one else could buy the land anyway. He forced this option on me! He told me to keep it for a day and think it over!"

"The crook!" flamed Mr. Appleton. "The double-barrelled, ring-tailed crook. He knows I been wantin' to buy that piece for years! He knows I need it! So that's why he always said what a fine buildin' it was when I threw out a hint. The grafter!"

"What?" demanded Mr. Simpson indignantly. "Is he double-crossing you?"

"Yes!" raged Hiram. "He's a thief!"

Mr. Simpson jammed the paper he had been waving into his pocket. He pulled his hat down over his ears. He took a step toward the door.

"I'll fling it in his face!" he threatened.

Hiram untangled his beard from his top vest button.

"Eighteen thousand, you say?" he questioned. "An' the opshun says buildin' and land?"

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"Yes!" snapped Gerald K. "I'll tell him a few things. Insulting me!"

Mr. Appleton jerked him toward a window.

"See that!" he choked. "That L is right where my spur comes in. It's on this side of the street where it ain't no use to him. And that buildin' of mine's down where I have to pay trucks to move things from one plant to the other. What does he value the land at?"

"Fifteen thousand!" cursed Mr. Simpson.

"'Tain't worth a cent over twelve!" averred Hiram. Then his clenched fist smote his palm. "There's on'y one way to treat a crook!"

"Yes sir!" nodded Mr. Simpson. "*Jail!*"

Hiram gripped his arm anxiously.

"No," he said slowly. "Make him lose money!"

Mr. Simpson looked blank.

"The opshun says buildin' *and* land, don't it?"

Gerald K. silently handed it out. Mr. Appleton read it, then he cackled. He gazed out of the window and he cackled again

"Not a cent more'n twelve!" he declared. Then he lowered his voice. "I'll give you twelve thousan' cash for this paper. I need that buildin'!"

Mr. Simpson bristled.

"I am out of the transaction. It is crooked. I will give the paper back and you can deal with him yourself!"

Mr. Appleton thought of the trolley terminal. He thought of Mr. Briggs. He remembered the years he had listened to praises of the building he coveted. He held in his hand the option that would give him the whole thing for *thirty* thousand dollars.

"I wouldn't do business with him!" he declared righteously. "But if any man sized *me* up for a crook I certain'y would show *him* up. If I could make a little money out of bein' honest and at the same time help another honest man out I'd do it." He paused suggestively. "This story'll ruin John Briggs's chances of ever bein' mayor. This town won't stand for no crook!"

"He hasn't a chance of being elected?" demanded Gerald K., staggered at the possibility.

"He's a big man," warned Hiram solemnly.

"Take it!" gulped Mr. Simpson. "I came here for a rest. But I'm a business man and twelve thousand will partially pay for some of the set back this terrible insinuation has caused my run-down nerves."

And he thanked Mr. Appleton earnestly as he folded up the check for twelve thousand and left the option. Mr. Appleton thanked him also, till the door closed. Then he cackled. After which he called on the telephone six members of his campaign committee.

Mr. Simpson's neck was still swollen with wrath when he climbed into the hack. The driver's questions had been bottled up a long time.

"What was that you said?" he gasped. "You said——"

"Hiram Appleton's a crook that's trying to do you out of the mayor job!" flamed Mr. Simpson. "He's fixing things to have the trolley terminal *here*"

"I'll—I'll—tell Mr. Langdon!" stammered the over-wrought hack-driver.

"It's criminal!" panted Mr. Simpson. "I must see Mr. Briggs. Can you wait?"

"Sure," declared the driver. "Maybe you'll find out some more."

"Possibly," stated Gerald K. grimly. "I will leave no stone unturned to insure the election of an honest man!" he nodded eloquently toward the driver.

"Mr. Langdon'll let you have some of that stock," promised the husky cabman.

"Thanks," murmured Gerald K. as he alighted, but there was only sadness on his face.

It was still there when he stood before John T. Briggs, the man who made the smooth-running elevators.

Mr. Briggs knew bad knews when he saw it.

"You're not going to refuse——" he groaned.

Gerald K. nodded.

"I'm afraid I can't touch it," he announced sadly. "Here's your option."

He tossed out a paper.

"It's a good building!" defended Mr. Briggs, unfolding the paper slowly. "It's fine— What's this!" His eyes popped out and his hands shook. "This is an option on Hiram Appleton's south-east building for twelve thousand dollars!" Outraged feelings were on the point of bursting.

Mr. Simpson lunged for it.

"I gave you the wrong one!" he cried.

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"Here!" He fumbled with a bunch of papers in his pocket.

John T. paid no attention. He was too busy with the collar button that was mashing his Adam's apple.

"Did that old crook sell you this building?" he demanded. "To get even, eh?" he sneered. "Because I was going to run for mayor! The old backbiter! He knows I've been trying to get that building for years, and he sells it to you—a stranger!"

"It's a good buy!" resented Mr. Simpson, still fumbling awkwardly. "He seems to want it torn down for some reason. I'll make ten thousand clear after I sell him back the land. Mayor must be a good job," he mused.

Mr. Briggs's Adam's apple almost slipped down his throat, so suddenly did he look up.

"Yes," he snarled. "It might be for a crook like Appleton!"

He looked down at the option once more.

"Ten thousand you say?" He had figured many times on how to get that building for thirty thousand.

"Yes!" laughed Mr. Simpson, proud of the fact that he was a business man.

Once more his arm was grasped. Once more he was led to a window.

"There's the building!" pointed Mr. Briggs tensely. "I want it for legitimate purposes. Mr. Appleton has some crooked game up his sleeve. Now—" he fixed a glittering eye on Mr. Johnson—"do you prefer to make ten thousand by entering into a crooked deal or will you take eleven thousand and align yourself with honesty, justice and straight business?"

"Why—why— It isn't shady," stammered Gerald K.

"It's darker than a stack of black cats!" swore Mr. Briggs. He pulled a check-book from a pigeon-hole with a sweep of his arm. "I won't insult your intelligence by asking that question again," he said, and Mr. Simpson, hypnotized by the rapidly moving pen, was silent. Mr. Briggs was a business man through and through!

IV

THE only thing that kept the proprietor of the Ralston House from weeping real tears on Mr. Simpson's shoulder was that gentleman's earnest statement that he would return to Ralston in the near future. He assured Mr. Hollister that only three things in the world waited for no man, be he either nervous or run-down. They were time, tide and business. Business had called him and he was hoo-hooing back.

The cabman was waiting patiently and he helped the three bell-boys, the porter and Mr. Hollister put Gerald K.'s bag on the front seat. Besides the driver's patience there was a wise grin on his face. Mr. Simpson glanced keenly at the blue and white telephone sign across the street and nodded. He had noticed that sign before when he had asked the hackman to wait.

When he had climbed on the front seat and bade the bunch good-by with shining half-dollars, the cabman clicked up his horses and leaned over to whisper into his fare's ear.

"I called up Mr. Langdon and told him about what Hiram Appleton was tryin' to do to our campaign," he said.

"Tell him I was going to drop in at the bank before I made the two-thirty-one?" asked Mr. Simpson casually, absent-mindedly handing over a fifty-cent cigar to the man on the seat beside him.

"Yes," nodded the bureau of information. "That's where he said he'd meet you. He seemed worried, but I told him we'd clean 'em up proper, thankin' you for your help. Too bad you're goin' away before we can reely pay you!"

"Don't mention it," smiled Gerald K. with a philanthropic sweep of his arm.

The driver didn't again, for dapper Mr. Langdon, looking a bit flustered, caught up with them two blocks down.

"Hop in!" called Mr. Simpson. "I'll take you down to the bank."

"If you could drop off at my store?" fussed T. Lawrence, who seemed to have a whole lot of trouble with one small batwing tie.

"Can't do it," declared Gerald K. "Got to make the train and do a little business at the bank. Hop in! We'll have ten minutes there."

T. Lawrence bit at the air, and it apparently gave him courage enough to climb silently into the hack. Or perhaps it was the sight of the grinning cabman, who looked so much bigger than a prize-fighter.

The minute the first wheel came to a stop before the door of the Ralston First National, T. Lawrence was out and he had Mr. Simpson by the arm.

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"Come into the directors' room a minute," he pleaded. "I want to talk with you."

"Be with you in a second, cabby," smiled Gerald easily, and he suffered himself to be led into the mahogany-finished room that had opened at a nod from the dapper little owner of the department store, who was also an official in the bank.

"What's this I hear?" demanded Mr. Langdon wrathfully. "Dan Thornton says you've seen Appleton and Briggs. He says you say Appleton is a crook."

"That's right!" grinned Gerald K. "He offered me a thousand dollars to show that option of mine to the hack-driver and tell him what my business is. They seem to think he's quite set on having that loft building for a campaign headquarters. Husky devil!" he commented, gazing out of the window toward the street where the cabman was driving slowly up and down, a bit impatient because important business regarding his campaign was being transacted behind closed doors.

"What?" howled T. Lawrence so violently that the bat-wing slid over his collar.

"Briggs wanted to tell the cabby himself," Mr. Simpson told the ceiling. He hated a double-crosser!

T. Lawrence backed away. He didn't want his clothes mussed. And out on the curb husky Dan Thornton was climbing off his box. Maybe Mr. Langdon needed help!

"Give me back that option!" T. Lawrence panted.

"Nix!" grinned Mr. G. Simpson, of New York and other places. "It's a good investment. The fact that it cost me nothing doesn't interfere with its binding qualities." He looked up at the ceiling once more. "I saw that hackman hit a fellow one blow, and he wasn't mad at that," he confided to the drop light over the mahogany table.

"Two thousand!" offered T. Lawrence. "That beats that old snapping-turtle, Appleton." The hack-driver was entering the door of the bank.

"Five," smiled Gerald K. "It certainly would make a good political yarn if a candidate killed his campaign manager, wouldn't it?" he observed grinning again at the drop-light.

"It's blackmail!" gurgled Mr. Langdon; then he dragged his check-book out as a knock came at the door.

"No," corrected Mr. Simpson softly. "Life insurance."

"Here!" T. Lawrence blotted it hastily. "Give me the option."

"Just identify me, will you?" asked Mr. Simpson easily. "I'd like this in the thousands." He looked at the open door and the cab-driver, who filled it. "Will you get my bag down, Dan," he requested politely. "Every thing's all fixed, isn't it, Mr. Langdon?"

"Yes," choked that person, and he led the way to the cashier's window. "Mr. Simpson," he snapped his introduction. "He's all right."

The cashier nodded. Mr. Simpson watched the hack-driver's broad back at the door. He handed over the option.

"You're a crook!" snarled Langdon as he snatched it and dashed out to assure the white-hope cab-driver that all things were smooth and pleasant.

"Hurrah!" cheered Mr. Simpson softly. "I knew a knock'd do it. This town'll be alive from now on. This election'll be pretty!"

And fifteen minutes later, with twenty-eight crisp new thousand dollar bills in his pocket, Mr. Simpson smiled up into the scowling face of his conductor friend.

"Well," snarled that happy person. "Did you get enough of Ralston?"

"Quite, thank you," smiled Mr. Simpson happily. "I might have got it all if I'd stayed longer; but I'm no hog! I'm a booster!"

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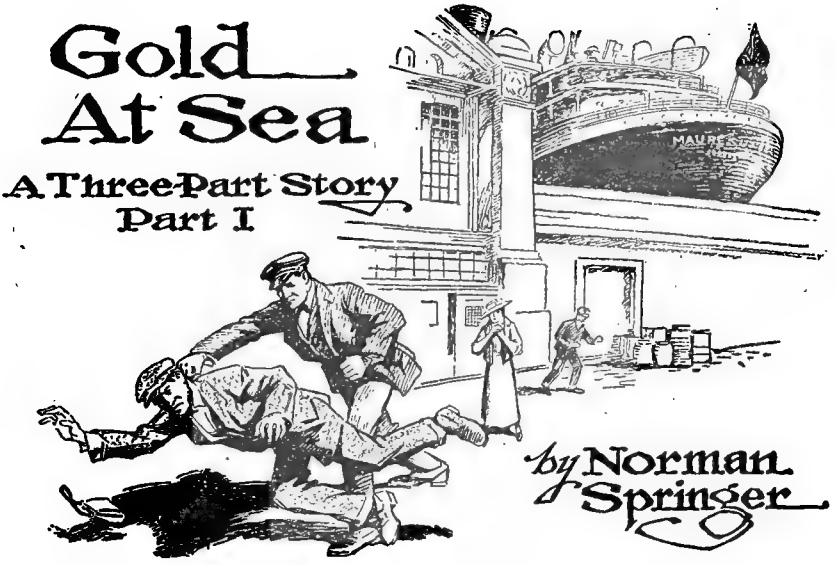
Gold At Sea

A Three-Part Story
Part I



by Norman Springer

Author of "For Tricks that are Vain," "For Ways that are Dark."

I MOUNTED the dusty stairs to Judson Haffner's office with Haffner's note in my hand, twenty-five cents in my pocket, and the hope of a job in my heart.

When I reached the head of the stairs I saw standing before Haffner's door a young fellow with "dude" written all over his cream-colored, skin-tight suit. He was staring at the black letter inscription on the door,

JUDSON HAFFNER
SHIPPING AGENT

When I approached, he turned to me a round, likable face and a pair of twinkling eyes.

"Hello, sport!" he greeted me. "Say, now, would you be a good guy and tell me something?"

I stopped and looked at him in inquiry.

"This!" He indicated the door with a wave of his hand. "What kind of a sport would a shipping agent be, now?"

"Why," I replied, "if you mean Haffner—he owns some steamships and rents more, and they carry freights and other things."

"Oh," he said, "ships—and freight—and other things. Say, now, would you be a good sport, and give me a match."

I gave him the match; but although he drew a cigarette from his pocket, he made no attempt to light it. Instead, he stood in a brown study.

"Say, now," he asked suddenly, "this guy, Haffner! I'm looking for a man named Haffner, but I don't think he is in the steamship business. This guy Haffner, now—a big, fat guy? Looks something like a pig?"

"No," says I. "Jud Haffner is a little dried-up guy—looks something like a fox."

"Oh!" exclaimed he. "Then he ain't the gink I want to see. But say, now, be a good sport, and tell——"

But what he wanted me to tell him next I never knew, for just then the door of Haffner's office opened. We both turned to see who was coming.

I repressed a gurgle of satisfaction. It was a big, pink-and-white Englishman who was coming out of Haffner's office—a clerk in the British consulate. I knew Courtney well by sight, for he attended to the maritime affairs of the consulate, and I had sailed in British ships. The sight of him leaving Haffner's office at such a time promised well for my chances of a job.

Courtney gave me a nod as he passed us on his way down the stairs. I returned the nod, but the little dude was lighting his cigarette, and had his face shielded by his hands—an incident I was to recall later.

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No sooner had Courtney disappeared from view than my questioner sprang to sudden activity.

"Thanks—you are a good guy, you are!" he called over his shoulder. "But this gink, Haffner, now—he ain't the gink I want!"

He dashed headlong down the stairs in the wake of the consulate clerk and was gone, leaving me to stare after him with some astonishment at his abrupt departure. Then I dismissed him from my mind as being just another crazy New Yorker, and turned and entered Haffner's office.

The tall, stenographic blond who read novels and chewed gum in the outer office took my name into the inner sanctum. In a moment she returned, shifted her quid into her cheek, and mumbled—

"Go on in."

I had told the chap on the landing that Haffner looked something like a fox, and the aptness of my own description struck me as I entered the dingy inner office. For Haffner was a fox—foxy features, foxy character. He sat huddled in the big chair behind his desk, and although his little, pointed face was turned to a visitor who was seated at his side, his furtive eyes were upon me instantly.

"Well, well, Mr. McNeil!" he cried, jumping to his feet and coming toward me with arms extended, as if I were a long-lost brother. "How are you Mr. McNeil? We were just talking about you.

"This is the man, captain!" he added, turning to the other man. "This is McNeil—a very good man, if I do say so myself! Haven't I always spoken a good word for you, McNeil?"

"I hope so," I said. I gave his hand a perfunctory squeeze, and came at once to business. "I received your note, Haffner, and have come over to see you at once. Have you got a berth for me?"

"A berth! Oh, dear, dear, a berth! But the trade is dead, McNeil! This terrible war—it will ruin us all!" Haffner's little, anxious eyes flitted over my person, and then darted to the face of the other man, who had remained seated. "But, McNeil, you must meet the captain—shake hands with Captain Dacy. Ah, two good men—two very good men, if I do say so myself."

The old villain smirked and rubbed his hands together as I greeted the man who arose and held out his hand to me.

Captain Dacy was a handsome man, blond, and big of body, with an erect figure and a drooping yellow mustache. A man of thirty-two or three, I judged. He owned a frosty, piercing, blue eye; but his face was pleasant, his handshake hearty, his voice robust.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. McNeil," he said. "I have known you by reputation, of course. It is too bad we have never been shipmates."

That surprised me, for I thought I knew all the skippers who worked for Haffner, and I had never heard of Dacy.

"McNeil was on the *Goboy*," remarked Haffner. "It was a terrible calamity; it nearly ruined me!"

"Oh, bosh!" I answered. I was certain from Haffner's mention of the *Goboy* that Captain Dacy was in the know, so I did not hesitate to speak plainly. "You can't blame me, or any of the others in the crew, for the loss of the *Goboy*. Blame the Government for teaching the revenue men to shoot straight. And remember, too, that you wouldn't be here now if I hadn't risked my own skin to save the manifests!"

"Yes, yes, I don't blame you, McNeil!" exclaimed Haffner. "It was the will of God!"

The old hypocrite's piety always got on my nerves, so I answered him shortly.

"Well, have you got a berth for me? I am after a job!"

At that Haffner broke out lamenting, damning the war, the hard times, and, above all, the Government.

"It is terrible!" he cried. "They are ruining business! An army in Vera Cruz, marines in Hayti, protectorate in Honduras, their cursed navy everywhere! They are ruining honest business men, McNeil! Only last week they held me up at Port-au-Prince for five thousand rifles and ammunition—thirty thousand dollars, McNeil, if I do say so myself!"

"Oh, rubbish!" I retorted. "I warrant whatever you lose out of one pocket you will make up in the other. But let us get to business. I know well enough you did not write me a note asking me to call for the single purpose of feasting your eyes upon my beauty. What do you want to see me about?"

Haffner gulped and grimaced, evidently at a loss how to begin. I decided to take a long shot.

"I was not contemplating a West India

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voyage," said I. "I was thinking of a little trip outside the port—say to a British man-o'-war!"

HAFFNER always was a timorous rat, and he promptly gave himself away. He sat down in his chair and stared at me, a very picture of consternation.

"What—what are you saying?" he quavered.

"Oh, don't get nervous," I soothed. "I don't know anything. It was just a guess on my part. I know that both German and British men-o'-war are cruising off the port in need of supplies. I know that Jud Haffner is always ready to risk his own dollars and other men's lives where there is a chance of a couple of hundred per cent. profit. And when I came in, I met Courtney of the British consulate going out. So, of course, I just put one and one together."

Haffner closed his mouth and breathed heavily with relief. Captain Dacy, who had shown a sudden interest in the turn the conversation had taken, leaned back in his chair and chuckled. The pair exchanged a rapid glance, and then the captain turned suddenly to me.

"McNeil," he asked, "have you a chief engineer's ticket?"

"Yes," I told him. "Both American and English. I am competent to handle anything afloat."

"Have you had any experience with turbines?" he continued.

"Why, yes," said I, surprised. I knew that none of the tubs Haffner controlled were fitted with turbines. "I brought the *Wallace* across from the Clyde last year. She has Parsons'. And last Spring I shook down a batch of new destroyers before they were turned over to the Government."

The captain was all interest.

"Ah," he said, "so you are familiar with a destroyer's engine-room! With oil-burners, also?"

"Yes," I said, "they were oil-burners."

"And I dare say you could walk right into any torpedo boat's engine-room, and take charge on the spot?"

"I dare say I could," I replied. "But what is your game? If you are trying to ship me for one of the navies in this war, you might as well save your time. My father was Scotch, my mother was German, and I am an American. I am neutral."

"No, no," he assured me. "I am not recruiting for either Britain or Germany. I should say not!"

The captain did not answer when I repeated my query as to what he was doing. He glanced at Haffner, and there seemed to be some sort of unspoken communication between them. Then, as suddenly as before, he popped another question.

"How do you stand with the law?" he demanded.

"Why," I answered, somewhat taken aback, "it depends upon the law. I have risked my liberty a good many times in filibustering voyages, but I have never descended to thievery."

"Of course you are open to a good proposition?"

"Of course," I assented. "What is it? I'll take a chance on gun-running or contraband, nothing worse. If it is smuggling —I remembered certain whisperings about another phase of Haffner's business—I won't have anything to do with it."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the captain. "A Yankee with a Scotch conscience!" He leaned back in his chair and let his cold eyes drill into me. "Well, now, just suppose that there was big money in it—and also a big risk."

"I am not afraid of a risk," said I, "but I want to know what it is."

"Would not the promise of a big reward induce you to go into it blindly?"

"No," I answered promptly. "I want to know the particulars before I pass my word. Haffner knows I can be trusted with a secret."

"No," said the captain. "You will discover what the venture is when we get to sea. There is big money in it, McNeil, and a bit of excitement, besides. I have heard you have a fine taste for excitement."

"The worse for me, if I have," I made reply. "The taste has never brought me anything except a peck of trouble."

"I need a good engineer, and I would like to have you for a shipmate," continued the captain. "If we have luck you will be a rich man two weeks from now."

"It must be a fine job, indeed," said I, "that will make a rich man out of the chief of one of Haffner's old coffins. I'll not deny it sounds attractive."

"Yes, yes," piped up Haffner. "It is a golden chance—the chance of your life,

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McNeil! Ah, you are a good man, if I do say so myself!" The old man jerked open a drawer of his desk and produced a thick slab of currency, the very sight of which made my eyes water. "You may have any advance you ask for, McNeil. Just give us your word to join—I trust you, if I do say so myself. Any advance you ask for!"

I think it was the sight of that greedy old sinner skimming over the money that made me hesitate with the word on the tip of my tongue. It was always well to be cautious when dealing with Haffner. Certainly, Captain Dacy was such a hearty-appearing man that I would have taken the chance and given my word straightway, had he alone been concerned. But the sight of Haffner steadied me.

"Tell me what the job is," I stated.

"No," replied the Captain decisively.

"Then I'm off," I said. "I am a ship's officer, and I don't ship where I am not trusted."

II

NO SOONER had Haffner's door closed behind me, and I found myself out upon the hard, hot West Street pavement, than I began to repent my hastiness in refusing Captain Dacy's offer.

"Why didn't you take it, you fool?" I asked myself. "You had the chance to ship with a fine, upstanding man, and you turned it down. What right have you to suspect Dacy of being crooked? There is no mark of the cheat in his face!" And then I thought of Haffner, and of the things I knew of Haffner. "An insurance fraud, or a barratry of some kind," I thought. "You are well enough out of it, McNeil."

But insurance fraud or barratry in no wise agreed with the impression Captain Dacy had made upon me. Whatever he was, I was sure Dacy was not that kind. But what was it? If it were just simple gun-running or contraband, why their secrecy before a tried man like myself? And so I wandered along the street, racking my wits.

The jostling of a passer-by aroused me to a sudden sense of my surroundings, and I stopped short and gazed about me. I discovered that I had come a full mile from Haffner's place, and that I was standing upon the curbing opposite the Black Star docks. The huge, four stack, *Mauresubia* was tied up to her berth, and her great, round stern towered high above the dock sheds and stared me in the face.

I absently rattled the five nickels in my pocket, and the peripatetic vender of fruits, whose stand was before me, looked up hopefully and commenced to shoo the flies away from his stock with a grimy rag. There was no encouragement in my face, however, and he soon subsided sleepily upon his stool. I stared at the British Naval Reserve ensign dropping from the *Mauresubia's* taffrail and talked to myself.

"Donald McNeil," I said, "you are a fool! Six years ago you had a good chance in that line yonder, and if you had behaved yourself you might now be walking those decks in blue and gold. But no, you wanted to see the world. You wanted adventure! Well, you have had it—and here you are, twenty-eight years old today, two-bits in your pocket and the only job in sight one that you are afraid will land you in jail. Donald McNeil, you are a double-barreled fool!"

But calling yourself names, even when you agree with yourself, is a wearisome and profitless occupation. It was uncomfortably hot on the curbstone in the full glare of the afternoon sun—it was Saturday, September 19th, a blistering day—and I was about to continue on my way when a commotion before the dock gates arrested my attention.

A huge motor-truck, followed by an automobile, rolled up to the gates. The automobile was filled with men. Four more men, armed with rifles, perched on top of the truck's load—though what that load was I could not make out, it being covered with a tarpaulin.

A couple of men leaped from the automobile and drove back the little crowd that immediately clustered about the vehicles. The men were in plain clothes, but from their authoritative manner, I judged them to be policemen. Being curious, I started across the street for a closer view.

The dock gates opened just as I reached the scene, and the truck, groaning with the weight of its cargo, swept inside. The passenger machine followed, the gates swung shut, and the dock guards took up their positions again. The docks in those September days were guarded like banks. The different lines were mightily afraid some of the European reservists knocking about the

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town would try some deviltry upon the boats.

"What is going on?" I asked of a man by whose side I found myself.

"Gold!" he answered. "Part of a shipment on the *Mauresubia*. I bet there was three million on that truck!"

"*Verdumpf!*" exploded a big, prespiring German. "Der English vas pigs! I hope dey sink und nefer get to England mit dere gold!"

"Ow! Don't 'ope!" a little Cockney retorted. "She'll get 'ome, no fear. Them shiners will buy bullets fur the Tommies! —— the Dutch!"

The Teuton replied with a string of German oaths, other voices joined in, and in an instant one of those furious street arguments, so common in the early days of the war, had started. There was every prospect of it developing into a pretty scrap, so I edged away to an advantageous position and waited.

"The English and the Dutch!" quoted a voice at my elbow. "Look at the fools fighting—and over our meat, too!"

"Hist-t!" came a second voice.

"Oh, blow the guff!" continued the first speaker. "We have need to think of what's coming. Here we are strapped and with a thirst. —— Haffner, I say! He might have given us another advance!"

"Shut up, Scully, you fool!" was the low-voiced enjoinder.

I felt their eyes sizing me up. The mention of Haffner's name had aroused my interest, and I glanced toward the pair.

They were both sea-farers; they had the carriage. The one nearest me—the one called "Scully"—was, I decided, connected with my own calling. He had the white face of an engine-room worker, though from his hang-dog look he might just as well have gained his pallor in a jail.

The other fellow was red—red head, red face—save where a dirty-white scar bisected his cheek. He looked like a mate or boatswain. As soon as they discovered my eyes upon them, they slouched away and turned from view around the corner of the dock shed.

A sudden increase in the polyglot cursing of the patriotic wranglers brought my eyes back to them. The circle burst asunder, and I saw the little Cockney clinging to the big German's throat, while the latter had his hands entwined in the little fellow's hair and was jerking his head about in a manner that threatened to separate it from his body altogether. The crowd closed in again, cheering, and then the law arrived, late, as usual.

Two policemen, reinforced by two dock guards, descended upon the disturbers. The crowd scattered before the onslaught. Presently, I saw the German and the Englishman galloping side by side over the cobblestones, their enmity forgotten, each intent upon escape. They both disappeared within the same saloon.

I WAS about to pass on myself, when, out of the door of the dock office just before me, walked a girl. I gulped when I saw her. Then I stopped short and watched her. I like to look at pretty women, though I usually lose my wits if I have occasion to speak to them. I have often thought that strange, for I get along finely with old ladies.

The girl gave me the cursory glance of a passer-by; and although she has since declared she was much impressed by my appearance, I doubt it very much. For my part, I instantly decided that she was quite the best looking girl I had seen in a long time. No drug-store had supplied the bloom that graced her cheek; her face was open and healthy and tanned. She looked so cool and capable and pretty, on that stifling day and dusty street, that she might have just stepped out of the picture on some magazine cover.

She was followed to the street by a bowing, obsequious clerk, who was saying:

"All right, miss, your reservation is certified. You may depend upon our giving careful attention to your luggage."

Upon her nodded reply, he hopped back into his cubbyhole, and the girl stepped smartly forward to the edge of the dock shed and beckoned to a taxicab, standing on the opposite side of the street. I stopped where I was and watched her out of the corner of my eye, and I found as much pleasure in the picture as I would have found in a cool drink.

She had something in her hand, and she held it up and commenced to finger it. I noticed, with a start, that it was a thick roll of yellow-backed bills. She opened her hand-bag and dropped the money inside, and then, dangling the bag from her arm, gazed across the street to where the taxi

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driver was having trouble starting his machine.

Around the corner of the dock shed ambled the two worthies who had stood at my side a few moments before. The red-headed one was in the lead, and as he passed behind the girl, he reached out and tore the hand-bag from her grasp. He tossed it to the other fellow and scooted, followed by the girl's startled scream.

The other fellow, Scully, dashed past me. I had just time to thrust out my foot and send him sprawling. The bag flew free, and when Scully jumped to his feet I took him by the throat.

He was a big man, near my own size, and I found I had a handful. He wrestled, and when I wiped my fist against his jaw, he tried to give me the knee.

I was forcing him down when a crack on the side of my head appraised me that Red-head had returned to his mate's rescue. I threw up an arm to guard against a second blow, and Scully drove his elbow into the pit of my stomach.

I grunted and sat down hard. The two thugs raced away across the street and disappeared around a corner, and all I could do for the moment was gape after them and pant for breath.

"Oh, oh! Are you hurt? Oh, my money! They have my money!"

The girl was before me, a perfect picture of dismay and solicitude.

"It's all right," I managed to gasp. "I'm sitting on it."

The fracas had transpired so quickly, it had escaped notice from the crowded street. Only the obsequious clerk bounced out of his office and came to my assistance. He helped me to my feet and commenced to brush my clothes. He also commenced to spout words as a fountain spouts water, assuring the girl she had nothing to fear, that he was there, and that the bad men had run away.

As soon as I was able, I bent over and retrieved the bag. It was mashed flat but was otherwise undamaged, so far as I could see. And it was worth far more than a couple of blows to see the owner's face when I handed it over.

"Oh, it is safe!" she cried; and she peered inside to make sure it was safe. Then she looked at me with a pretty change of countenance. "But you—they hurt you!"

"I'm all right," I told her. I had my wind back by then. "But you nearly saw the last of your money. West Street is a poor place in which to flash a roll."

"I was careless," she said. "And, oh, if I had lost it—what would I have done? I am going to England, and it is all the money I have. How can I thank you!"

She gave me such a radiant look that I felt my skin prickle all over.

I never could talk with ease to a young woman, and to add to my present embarrassment, that wretched clerk was still brushing me down and babbling and grinning. I wanted to talk with her, and all I could do was stammer—

"I was only too glad to help you."

The tardy taxicab had arrived by this time, and was awaiting with open door for the girl's entrance. The driver was surveying me critically. The girl ran her eyes over me also, and I became acutely conscious of my hulking size, and freckles, and generally disreputable appearance.

"I owe you many thanks," she said frankly and gravely. "If I had lost my money I don't know what I would have done."

I stood there tongue-tied, unable to think of an answer. I heard the clerk chuckle behind me. The girl opened her bag and reached inside, and I felt my face getting red. She noticed it, too, for she shut the purse with a snap and thrust out her hand.

"Thank you," she said simply. "My name is Mary Morrison, and some day I may be able to repay you for your brave service."

I extended my paw, and her cool, firm little hand gave it a hearty pressure.

"Oh, it was nothing," I managed to say. "My name is Donald McNeil, and I was really delighted to be of service."

She smiled and turned away. I stared. She paused with her foot on the running-board of the machine, and lifted her eyes to mine. I don't know what she saw in my eyes, but she blushed and smiled. She had some crimson carnations pinned to her bosom. She drew one out and tossed it to my feet.

Then the door of the cab slammed behind her, and she was gone.

I heard a sniff behind me, and turned to grasp that accursed clerk. But the little rat was too nimble for me, and dove into his hole. I stood there a long while afterward, staring down the street, a little red flower in my hand.

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III

MOTHER McCAN had the reputation of keeping the neatest, homiest boarding-house on the quayside of Brooklyn. We who were her boarders were accounted fortunate. What if her tongue were sharp at times? Her heart was big enough to shelter a battleship's crew.

We all loved her—every shell-back mate and hell-roaring engineer in the house; admired her, too, for the buffeting fortune had given her would have soured rather than mellowed most women. When the late lamented McCan departed this sphere via the pink alligator route, he bequeathed to Mother McCan only the memory of a stormy married life and three little McCans to be cared for. She had had a bitter struggle.

Mother McCan met me in the hallway with as lugubrious an air as her pleasant features could assume, and the announcement that "little Patrick, poor dear, has busted his ar-rm whilst ridin' the tale ind o' the ice-wagon, —— him!" The news did not surprise me, for little Patrick, poor dear, was always breaking something. But it did trouble me, because I knew the condition of Mother McCan's finances as well as I knew my own bankrupt state.

She also handed me a note which she said had arrived an hour or so ahead of me. It proved to be a communication from Captain Dacy.

> If you will come to Jake Meyer's place, on Dock Street, Brooklyn, tonight at nine o'clock, your scruples will be satisfied. ROGER DACY.

The note and the news of Patrick's mishap served to banish effectually the pleasant speculations about the blue-eyed girl, with which I had been amusing myself during the long tramp homeward. My mind was forced to consider the material fact of my non-employment.

Throughout supper I thought of the mysterious berth Captain Dacy had offered me, and the money Haffner had been willing to advance. And after supper I avoided the gossips on the front stoop and betook myself and my pipe to the streets, there to think the matter out.

Mother McCan needed money, and I had none. I saw no prospect of obtaining a regular berth. The war had paralyzed shipping, and a host of good men were tramping the docks.

Captain Dacy's offer seemed to be my one chance. Little as I liked the idea of mixing up in Judson Haffner's affairs with my eyes shut, that roll of bills Haffner had offered me kept recurring to my mind.

But what was their venture? Was it contraband? Their talk of fortunes mystified me. It was nonsense to connect wealth with a simple contraband trip. The backers might expect a big sum, but the best I would receive as ship's officer would be a few hundred dollars—a thousand at the most.

Captain Dacy's talk of great rewards could only have been to induce me to ship under sealed orders. Haffner's offer of unlimited advance money was certainly surprising in a man who usually had to be pried loose from a five-cent piece; but if the money were British Government money, his action was reasonable enough.

By the time I had finished my second pipeful, I was repenting my hasty action of the afternoon. I reproached myself for not having passed my word and accepted the advance money off-hand. It might now be too late. But no, I was to be given another chance. At Jake Meyer's place I would receive both the money and explanations as to the undertaking. I looked forward with impatience to the meeting in Dock Street, and bent my steps in that direction.

And then, while thinking of Captain Dacy, there occurred the first of those mind tricks that were to puzzle me in the days to follow. In my mind's eye I was gazing at Dacy as I had seen him in Haffner's office, and suddenly, without reason, his face dissolved into the face of the West Street girl. It is true a lad and lass passed me at that moment, arms entwined, and seeking the shadows. That may have had something to do with the vision. But even so, it was a surprise to me.

I had ever been backward with young women and had always come away from my rare encounters with them with a sense of relief at my escape and but a confused memory of their charms. But with this girl who called herself Mary Morrison it seemed to be different. Without any apparent reason, her face appeared before my eyes and I found I remembered her perfectly—the warm tints in her eyes, the soft southern slur in her speech, the beauty of her face, even the little cameo jewel she had worn about her neck.

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To walk the streets on a warm Summer's night with the face of a beautiful girl before your eyes is a fond occupation. It was a business to which I was unaccustomed, but which I found none the less pleasant for my inexperience. And although I knew it was silly—Donald McNeil, Western Ocean bucko, weaving fancies about a girl he had seen but once, and who was undoubtedly so far removed from his sphere in life that he would never see her again—still, I abated my pastime not a jot.

OF A sudden my musings were interrupted by voices raised in pleading and expostulation. I looked about me and discovered that I was standing upon the corner of Dock Street, and but a half block from Meyer's place.

"Aw say, now—be a good sport and tell me, ain't you the guy?"

"Certainly not!" came the second voice. "My good fellow, I don't know what your bally rot means, you know. You have made a mistake, you know."

Beneath the lamplight on the corner stood the little dude in the cream-colored raiment, who had accosted me before Haffner's door. Evidently he was still in search of his "gink."

But the man he was addressing! Imagine a little straw hat perched on top of an enormous black wig, and the wig running into a jutting mass of black whiskers. And out of this jungle of hair peered the smooth, pink-and-white face of Courtney, the British consulate clerk. The contrast between the hat and face and the wild, anarchist bush behind which he sought to hide was ludicrous.

"Aw now, say—don't get sore, old sport!" urged the little searcher. "I thought you must be the gink. The chief says to me, he says: 'Meet a gink with a light suit what's hiding behind a black fuzz. Ask that gink how about Wilbur Oates.' Come now, sport, ain't you the guy?"

"I have told you no, you know!" exploded Courtney. "My word, *cawn't* you understand English? I don't know what you are talking about, you know. I don't know you!"

"All right, sport—I guess you ain't the guy," remarked the little man. He turned away from Courtney and caught sight of me. "Oh, say now!" he ejaculated. "Here's a good guy—you don't get sore over a little question, do you, sport?" He bobbed his head at me in a most friendly fashion. "But I guess I'll drift; you ain't the gink I want!"

He waived an airy good-by to Courtney, gave me a wide smile and stepped briskly from the curb and disappeared in the darkness of the street.

"Beastly rotter!" muttered Courtney. "Jolly cheek, I call it! Don't know him at all, you know!"

I looked at him and struggled to restrain my mirth. I hesitated to address him by name, though, for his disguise, whatever its effect, had evidently been assumed to mask his identity. But he turned to me immediately.

"Thank you, McNeil," he said. "You jolly well saved me from chastising that chap. Beastly bounder, you know—so deuced persistent!"

I said nothing, and Courtney misinterpreted my silence. He screwed up his face inside its hirsute mask and whispered portentiously:

"Ha! You don't know me, you know. But I jolly well know you, you know!" And with that he turned and walked rapidly away, chuckling to himself as over a good joke.

I looked at my watch and found it to be but a few moments of nine, my trysting-time with Captain Dacy. Immediately, I started eagerly down Dock Street toward the red and green riding-lights that embellished the front door of Jake Meyer's resort.

Jake Meyer was a well-known character on the Greater New York water-front. Indeed, his fame, or ill-fame, spread through the seven seas; for the gentle Jake plied the crimp's trade as well as the publican's. He made a specialty of securing crews for the big windjammers in the California trade, often by means of the black-jack and lethal bottle, or rumor did him wrong. I had never seen him, nor been in his joint, but I knew both well by repute.

The groggery was situated in a ramshackle, two-story, wooden structure. In the night-light I could faintly discern a schooner of beer of prodigious size, painted on the face of the building, designed, I suppose, to charm the mariner who chanced that way by day. By night, the riding-lights beckoned the wayfarer.

I entered a low-ceilinged barroom and

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made my way to the farther end of the bar. I replied to the sharp glance of the bartender by ordering a glass of the five-cent whisky they serve in such places, and dumped the vile stuff into a spittoon the moment the low-browed Ganymede's back was turned.

My survey of the room failed to reveal Captain Dacy, or Haffner, or any one I knew. None save a few hangers-on were in the place. Gradually, I became aware of a low hum of conversation, coming from a closed door at my back. I reasoned that the meeting-place would be in the back room, and placed my hand on the door-knob to enter.

"Here you! Where youse goin'?" shouted the bartender.

He slipped around the corner of the bar and came toward me, and at the same instant a great hulking brute, with "bouncer" stamped upon his face, appeared at my other side.

I backed away from the pair and managed to lay my hands upon the back of a chair—a chair is a handy weapon in a free fight—and awaited their pleasure.

"Youse can't go in there!" cried the bartender. "What in —— do you want here, anyway?"

"It isn't any of your blanked business," I informed him, "but if you must know, I have an appointment in this place with a man who calls himself Captain Dacy."

At the mention of Dacy's name both worthies promptly forsook their menacing attitude.

"Oh," said the bartender, "just wait a jiffy." He stepped to the closed door and rapped smartly upon it. "Jake! Hey, Jake!" he called.

The door opened a few inches.

"Hey, Jake," he continued, "there's a big jasper out here what tried to walk through. Says he has a date with the captain."

The door opened a scant ways, and a heavy-bodied, beetle-browed man appeared. He closed the door behind him, and then carefully looked me over. I knew him for the redoubtable Jake Meyer, himself.

"I have an appointment with captain Dacy," I told him, "and your slab-faced drink artist and this other big bum tried to prevent my keeping it. I am not in the habit of being held up by such scum."

"Oh, aye," he answered me. "The captain left word about you." He gave me a rather queer look, and the bartender and the bouncer exchanged a rapid glance. "You'll be the man," Meyer continued, "over six foot, an' with a bit of a temper—that'll be you for sure. All right, mister; don't take it hard the boys stopped you; we got to be careful. Just come inside and wait."

I followed him into the back room. He closed the door behind us and then guided me to a chair.

"Just sit down, mister," said he. "The captain will be here soon. Just name your drink and I'll bring it in to you. Anything you want?"

"Nothing," I told him. "I'll do well enough dry."

The crimp seemed to be disappointed with my answer. However, he urged me no further at the time, but returned to the barroom. I looked about me.

I was in a large room, ill-lighted with gas, and thick with the haze of tobacco smoke. The two windows were boarded up, and upon that hot night the place was stifling.

At the far end of the room some half-dozen men, and some women of the class who frequent such places, were gathered together at a table over drink.

"Oh, ho!" thought I. "Here are some of Dacy's crew!"

But after regarding them I was puzzled. There was an unmistakable smack of the sea about some of the men, but they acted differently from any shipmen I have ever seen gathered before liquor. There was none of the jovial boisterousness of "Jack ashore" about them; and none of them advanced to me with the hand of fellowship, as I would have expected sailors to have done. But I noticed that they furtively eyed me.

"A capable looking bunch," I decided, "but containing more than one jailbird, or I am much mistaken."

Meyer entered the room again and approached me.

"Just make yourself to home, mister," he urged ingratiatingly. "The captain will be here soon. Just have a drink or two—they won't hurt you. Anything you want, and I'll bring it to you myself."

"No," I said, "I wouldn't insult my stomach with the tanglefoot you keep in this place. I want nothing."

The crimp turned away from me with a worried air. He approached the group at

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the other end of the room, leaned over their shoulders and engaged in a low-voiced conversation.

Suddenly, one of the women arose to her feet, laughing shrilly. The laugh was followed by a curse in a man's voice and the thud of a blow. The woman fell to the floor. She scrambled to her feet and ran toward me, followed by the brute who had struck her.

She was but a poor, sodden creature, probably well accustomed to blows and curses, but it loosed my temper to see her so mishandled. When she dashed past me, I leaped forward, caught her pursuer by the scruff of the neck and swung him backward.

He fell over a chair, but regained his feet instantly. He came at me, and I gained my first square look at his face. It was the man of the West Street purse-snatching episode—the fellow, Scully!

"Get him, mates!" he gave mouth. Then he seemed to recognize me. "Hey, Ralder!" he yelled. "It's the West Street guy! It's a dick! Lay him out!"

He jumped for me. I sidestepped, and because he was half-drunken and slow, I was able to catch a Japanese wrist-hold upon him. I used his arm as a leverage, and he was in mid-air when I felt his wrist-bone snap. I let go, and he landed heavily upon his back, screaming with pain.

The gang was upon me! Scully's mate, the red-headed man, was to the fore, and a shower of blows sent me reeling backward. I grasped a chair and brought it into play, and the red-headed man went down.

I heard the door to the barroom open and feet rush across the floor behind me. Something hit me a crushing blow upon the top of the head. I spun about dizzily and caught a glimpse of a figure standing in the doorway—the wide-smiling face of Captain Dacy.

Then I felt myself falling.

IV

A THROBBING *thump - thump - thump*, a sharp pain in my head and the smell of whisky, were the first things I became sensible of. I opened my eyes.

I was lying, fully clad, in a ship's bunk. I sensed that the *thump-thump-thump* was the vibration of the ship's engines, and knew that I was at sea. The pain was caused by a lump on the top of my head, of much the same size and shape as a hen's egg. I felt of it gingerly and tried to think.

Dacy—Meyer—Scully! The words flashed across my consciousness. Shanghaied!

I sat up, wide awake, swung my legs over the bunk-edge and looked about me.

It was daylight, and the room I surveyed I could have described without ever having seen it. It was the engineer's room on a cargo boat; they are as alike as peas and I have lived in many of them—iron walls, swinging wash-basin, electric lamp, desk and lockers, shelf of technical books, somebody's working clothes dangling from pegs on the bulkhead, and a chair upon which was a whisky bottle.

The bottle caught my eye. I became aware again of the smell of spirits. The place reeked with it. I suddenly discovered that it came from myself, from my own clothes. My coat front was glossy and stiff and looked and smelled as if it had been saturated with whisky.

I reached over and grasped the bottle. It was half filled, and I gulped down a mouthful of the raw stuff. Then I stood upon my feet, a little wabbly but with a clear head.

Shanghaied! What else? But it did not seem reasonable! I was no sodden foremast hand to be knocked on the head and dumped aboard ship for some crimp's amusement and profit. And this was no filthy forecastle I had awakened in—it was an engineer's cabin!

I tried the door. It was locked from without. I was just about to assault it with my boots when I heard the lock click and the door opened. A little man, dressed in white jacket and apron, confronted me. He bore a tray upon which reposed a steaming bowl of coffee.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "So my patient is up! Here is your coffee."

I greedily seized the bowl, and the hot draft strengthened me. While I drank I observed the fellow who had offered it.

He was a spare little man, middle-aged, and very white as to complexion. He had an intelligent face; he wore glasses, and the eyes that peered through them were red-rimmed, hard and bright. A rather gentle-featured little man; but when he spoke, he drew down one corner of his mouth and the words slid out edgeways from almost

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motionless lips—a most sinister trick of speech.

"How did I come aboard here?" I demanded, handing back the bowl.

"Carried aboard," he smiled. "I must congratulate you upon the thickness of your skull. I do not think it is solid ivory, sir, but it is nearly as hard. It must be an invaluable asset to you in your adventurous calling."

Unconsciously, I felt of the lump on the top of my head.

"Ah," he continued, "let me see the wound this morning. So—it is getting along very nicely; by tomorrow it will be but a memory. I could not dress it last night because a bandage might have led the inspector to ask questions, and we were in a hurry to clear port. My, my! It was shameful—the good whisky we wasted upon you! I thought Henderson would weep at the sight."

"What?" I cried. "Whisky — Henderson!"

"Yes, sir. You were drunk last night, shamefully drunk. The inspector said you were shamefully drunk when he poked his head in this door. The captain took particular care to show you to him."

"See here!" I exclaimed. "What the devil are you talking about? Did you pour whisky over me while I lay unconscious, making me smell like a distillery and ruining a good suit of clothes? What Henderson? Is 'Hot Scotch' Henderson on this craft? What ship is this?"

"The good ship *Hardship*, from nowhere to somewhere!" He backed smilingly away before my stream of questions. I followed him through the door to the deck. "See the Captain for particulars!" With that he dove through the entry to the cabin and was gone.

I LOOKED about me, and from habit swept the horizon first. The sun was some two hours high; the sea as smooth as a mill-pond, and save for the craft I was on, deserted. Astern, on the quarter, I recognized a dim blue line as Fire Island.

I was standing upon the amidship or bridge-deck of a small cargo steamer, an oil-tanker, as I saw at a glance. A life-buoy, hanging on the cabin bulkhead, bore the inscription, "S. S. *Ormsby*, New York."

I looked upward at the bridge and saw a head and back I knew very well, standing out above the weather cloth. It was the figure of Hot Scotch Henderson. Henderson was a Haffner man; he had been my captain on the *Goboy*.

I took the bridge ladder two steps at a time and bore down upon him.

"Hello, McNeil!" he greeted me, his hard, red face cracking into a smile. "How's the head? Lord, man, stand to loo'ard of me, won't you? You smell too rich entirely to get to wind'ard of a thirsty man the first mornin' out!"

"Never mind the smell!" I cried. "I doubt not it was one of your crazy, drunken tricks that spoilt my clothes last night—but what the devil do you mean by it? Did you bring me aboard here? Where is this ship bound? Are you skipper?"

"Easy, Mac, easy!" quoth Henderson. "One at a time. It was no joke of mine that wasted a quart of good stuff on your coat—'twas cruel necessity. I'm not skipper, I'm mate. Search me where we're bound—an' there's the skipper behind you!"

I spun about on my heel. Captain Dacy stood in the chart-house entrance, regarding me with a broad smile; while from behind his shoulder peered the smooth face of Courtney, the consulate clerk.

"Hello, McNeil!" hailed the captain jovially. "Up early and looking for trouble, I see!"

"Are you responsible!" I commenced.

The captain held a forefinger to his lips, and with his other hand motioned for me to enter the chart-room. The gesture checked my speech, and I obeyed.

The captain closed the door and turned to me, his joviality gone and his face grave.

"McNeil," said he, "we owe you an apology. We want to assure you that your kidnaping was unpremeditated."

"Beastly trick, old chap," said Courtney. "Not our fault—'pon honor."

"Why was I brought aboard here, then?" I demanded.

"Necessity," stated Dacy. "I had to have an engineer, and I had to get to sea. By Heaven, McNeil, you are a bad man in a fight! You put Scully on the shelf for a good month, at least."

"My word, yes!" interjected Courtney. "Snapped his arm in two places—steward set it—awfully queer chap, the steward—regular jolly doctor!"

"He only got what was coming to him,"

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I said. "He struck a woman just before I hit him."

"It put me in a hole," said Dacy. "Scully was one of my engineers. I only had one other engineer shipped, and with Scully on the shelf I had to fetch you along. I was already counting upon you for chief."

"Who was it knocked me out?" I asked.

"The barman — jolly scoundrel! My word, what a crack he gave you!" remarked Courtney.

"He black-jacked you," stated the captain. "But you must remember, McNeil, you started the row yourself. They thought you were a police spy."

"Town full of bally spies," commented Courtney.

"Black-jacked me because I wouldn't allow myself to be drugged," I said.

I watched Dacy's face, but he gave no sign that the shot struck home.

"You are too suspicious," he answered. "I hardly think Meyer would have contemplated giving you a dose from the black bottle. He does not recruit among your sort."

"But you do," I said bluntly.

"Oh, come, come! Don't be nonsensical! Why should I shanghai you? Engineers are plentiful. I only brought you aboard to save a little time—an hour's search would have supplied a dozen men. I already counted you as one of my men. You had given me a conditional promise to ship, and I was prepared to satisfy your curiosity."

"Of course, of course!" cried Courtney. "What bally rot! You cawn't really think your being done up was planned, you know. My word, I would never have permitted such a thing."

"Were you there when the trouble happened?" I asked him.

"I arrived just after the shindy. You were laying on the floor, and Captain Dacy was forbidding the men booting you. My word, you should be grateful to him!"

I was grateful. But all the same, in the back of my head stuck the memory of Dacy's smiling face in the doorway just as I was struck down from behind.

"What is the game?" I demanded. "Where are we bound, and what do I get out of it?"

"You guessed it yesterday," said the captain, after a glance at Courtney. "Contraband of war. We are running supplies and fuel oil to a British man-o'-war."

"Beastly risky business," added Courtney. "Violating jolly neutrality laws—all that sort of thing. My word, I have been in a sweat this past week. Town full of German spies. Had to go about disguised you know."

"What pay-day?" I asked the captain.

"Thousand dollars for you," he answered. "You'll be ashore again in a couple of weeks."

A thousand! I could feel a little imp of joy dancing about inside of me. What did it matter how I came aboard! But I did not show my satisfaction too plainly.

"How about that fortune?" I demanded.

The captain smiled and shook his head, and Courtney looked puzzled. So then, the wild talk of riches in Haffner's office had been merely for effect, as I had suspected.

"Well," I said to the captain, "however I got here, I am here. I know enough of the sea to acknowledge you are boss. I'll do my work. But when I get back to New York, I'll have a visit to pay in Dock Street."

"Then the Lord help them!" rejoined Dacy cheerfully.

He was going to say more, when the tinkle of the steward's bell came from the cabin below.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "That sounds good. After breakfast, McNeil, you can go below and get acquainted with your engines. You will have to stand watch, I fear, as you have only one assistant, Mr. Johnson."

"He's a ruddy Swede," said Courtney. "Awfully queer chap. Looks at me as though he did not like me—won't talk to me at all, you know."

"He knows his business," commented the captain briefly.

We stepped out upon the bridge. I noticed immediately that Hot Scotch Henderson had been relieved during our stay in the chart-house, and that another man had the watch.

The relieving officer stood with his back toward us, and I noticed that his head, beneath his cap, was swathed with bandages. There was something vaguely familiar about his figure and I eyed him sharply. He must have felt my eyes upon his back, for he swung about, and I found myself facing Scully's mate, the red-headed man.

The sight of him startled me. I dare say I clenched my fists and took a step forward, for he drew hurriedly back from me and his

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right hand dropped to his hip. The captain sprang between us.

"No brawling!" he exclaimed. "I can have no fighting between my officers, McNeil!"

"Of course not, sir," I replied; I saw there must be peace between the fellow and myself.

"This is Mr. Ralder, my second mate," the captain continued. "He is sorry for the trouble of last night—it was the result of a misunderstanding. There must be no quarreling between you two!"

"We will not fight," I assured him.

But I thought to myself that in Hot Scotch Henderson and this waterside thug with the bandaged head, the *Ormsby* had a precious pair of knaves for deck officers.

The second mate favored me with an evil look. He must have read and resented the satisfaction in my eyes as I contemplated his bandaged head. Evidently the chair had done greater execution than the blackjack!

He mumbled something about too much drink and being sorry for a mistake and shoved out his hand. But shaking hands with a cutthroat of his ilk did not seem to me to be in the bargain, and I ignored the gesture.

"We will not fight," I continued, "because, I dare say, the ship is large enough for us to keep out of each other's way."

Ralder scowled, and the scar on his cheek grew livid as he choked back his rage. He said nothing, though, and I divined that he stood in considerable awe of Dacy. I was rather chary of incurring the captain's censure, myself; he looked like an ill man to cross. Still, I gave myself a bold bearing and turned my back upon the second mate without more ado.

The captain said nothing, but he gave me a quick look of disapproval. Courtney muttered something about "all being jolly good fellows, you know." Then the three of us descended to the cabin.

V

A MAN who follows the sea for a living is not to be easily surprised by any oddity about a shipmate or a ship. The sea is the home of the unusual, and a sailor accepts queer men and queer ships as a matter of course. Yet, surprises came to me thick and fast upon the *Ormsby*.

The sea is the home of custom, as well as of the unusual. A rigid etiquette governs life on shipboard, and a deviation from fixed course becomes at once remarkable. The forecastle and the cabin are different worlds and may not mix. In the cabin itself a line is sharply drawn between the senior and junior officers. They do not mess together.

So I opened my eyes and looked closely when, at the breakfast table, an anemic young man was introduced to me as Mr. Podd, the wireless operator. Mr. Podd, according to custom, should have eaten at the second table with the second mate and my own assistant.

Mr. Podd's appearance was no less surprising than his presence. He was a tall young man, thin to emaciation. He had bulging, staring eyes and his face bore such look of settled melancholy that he most resembled the comic paper conception of an undertaker. His shoulders twitched continuously, as if he were afflicted with some nervous complaint.

Keeping his mouth shut seemed to be a thing Mr. Podd did very well. He acknowledged our introduction with a nod, cast his eyes upon his plate and sat in moody silence throughout the meal, barely tasting his food—a queer looking and acting fellow.

I opened my eyes even wider when I sensed the position the little steward, my friend of the coffee bowl, seemed to occupy upon the ship.

He made hardly a pretense of waiting upon the table, delegating that labor to a giant negro called "Turk," whom I judged to be the cook. But if he did not work, he talked. He joined familiarly into the table conversation and kept up a running fire of comment and retort. His speech was that of an educated man, but the words slipped out of the corner of his mouth, through still lips, in a flat, sinister monotone. The meat of his talk was so excellent, and its fashion so peculiar that I could not help regarding him with astonishment.

I was astonished also at his temerity, and then at his immunity. Dacy had impressed me as being a disciplinarian—certainly not the kind of skipper who would endure undue familiarity on the part of a subordinate. Yet he was intimate with the little steward, called him "Doctor," and often appealed to his judgment.

We talked about the war, and Courtney damned the Dutch roundly. The captain

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directed the conversation toward naval affairs, and showed himself to be well acquainted with naval strategy. One would have judged him to be a well posted naval officer, rather than the commander of a rusty old tramp.

We had some words on the subject of turbines. I recalled that Dacy had quizzed me on the same subject in Haffner's office, and put it down in my mind that turbines were a hobby with him. There certainly was nothing of a turbine about the *Ormsby's* engine; I could feel the old reciprocating junk-pile's thump with every turn of the screw.

I am afraid I was more than a little flattered by the captain's interest. It is seldom an engineer meets a sailor so well posted on mechanics, or so willing to accredit the engine-room with its due importance on shipboard. Most bridge ornaments regard the black-gang as a necessary evil, attendant upon modern navigation, and I must admit that most engineers take the same view of the deck. Hence, I keenly enjoyed the captain's talk, though it did rather reach over the heads of Henderson and Courtney.

And then it came to me again! With the same startling abruptness as before, for a second time the vision came.

I was listening to the captain explain a nautical term to Courtney. I was watching his face and mentally remarking upon the strange contrast between his cold eyes and smiling lips.

Of a sudden I was staring across the table at the friendly eyes and warm beauty of the West Street girl! It was Mary Morrison who sat and smiled in the captain's chair! A flash, and it was gone; but the apparition was so sharp and clear and unexpected that it brought me to my feet with a bound.

The table stared at me.

"What's the matter?" asked the captain.

I pulled myself together.

"Nothing, nothing," I answered. "Just a little twinge." And I gently stroked the bump on the top of my head.

"If that contusion bothers you, I had better dress it," remarked the doctor, coming to my side and regarding me with professional interest.

"No, I'm all right," said I. "I'll take a turn on deck and then go below and relieve my man."

I made my escape from the cabin in two minds whether to kick myself or laugh at myself. I was bewildered.

Twice now had a girl's face resolved itself out of airy nothing before my very eyes. I had not been thinking of her—each time I had been thinking of Captain Dacy. It was nonsensical! What was there in Dacy's stern, mustached visage to bring Mary Morrison's sweet face to mind?

It was utterly foreign to my experience. I was no Spring poet with a fancy, or callow youth with a passion, to thus vision my lady's features at will. And besides, it came to me unbidden, and "my lady" was a total stranger, a girl I had met but once upon the street.

I snorted an impatient oath. I decided I should both laugh at and kick myself, and straightway caught my hand feeling of my shirt's breast-pocket, where a drooping red carnation had reposed since the evening before.

I brought myself up with a jerk, strode to the room in which I had awakened, donned a suit of the dungarees that hung on the wall and started for the engine-room.

NOISE, grime and semi-gloom; engine running like a rock-crusher, with a thump in the intermediate crank fit to wake the dead; it was a typical tramp's engine-room.

A middle-aged, blond man, with a Kaiser Wilhelm mustache, stood before the throttle. He was whistling, and when the tune reached my ear I was startled. He whistled "The Watch on the Rhine."

"Good morning," said I. "Are you Mr. Johnson?"

He turned to me a phlegmatic face, and inspected me with a pair of mild blue eyes.

"*Ja, ja,*" he said. "Und you vas der chief!"

"Hello!" thought I. "Here is a queer Swede!" Aloud I said: "Yes, I am Mr. McNeil. I've come down to take the watch. Your breakfast is waiting."

"Dot vas good. I vas hungry."

"Get some sleep after breakfast. I'll keep the watch until noon. We shall have to stand watch and watch, Mr. Johnson."

"*Ja,* I know," he replied. "You fixed dot deffil, Scully—dot vas good!"

"Why, I am glad you feel like that," I said, warming to the chap. We both evidently had the same opinion of the absent

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Scully. "I was afraid you might prove another of his friends."

"*Nein!*" he declared emphatically. "I make no friends mit trash!"

I stood and stared at him. The morning had somewhat schooled me against surprise, but I had reason enough to stare. I had expected Mr. Johnson to be a "square-head," true to type. I had looked for a rough-neck, tramp-steamer bucko. Instead, I found a man with culture and breeding stamped upon his face, and who looked, in spite of his dungarees, as if he would be more at home on a war-ship's quarter-deck or liner's bridge, than in the *Ormsby's* engine-room.

"She vas an old raddledrap, but she goes aroundt," he stated, indicating the engine. "Dere vas der watch."

He pointed, and I saw three men clustered aft by the thrust-block, watching us.

"Blenty of men," said Johnson. "Dere vas four more in der stoke-holdt."

"What?" I cried.

"*Ja*—blenty of men. Seven men to der watch—dree watches. I go up now."

I watched him up the ladder and through the door to the deck. Then I turned to my command.

Mr. Johnson's parting words quite took away my breath. Seven men to a watch! That meant twenty-one men in the black-gang, exclusive of Johnson and myself. And a ship like the *Ormsby*—an oil-burner—only rated six men besides officers in her entire engine-room force.

The trio by the thrust-block lounged and talked and eyed me covertly. Apparently Mr. Johnson had not impressed his watch with a sense of discipline. However, I left them idle for the moment.

I inspected the department. Johnson had been right when he called the old triple expansion a "raddledrap;" she was rusty and shaky and leaky. But she would run. The powerful cargo-pumps were new; the boilers were all right, though the stoke-hold was filthy; the oil-burners were of a standard make.

In the stoke-hold I discovered the other four men of the watch, as Johnson had predicted. They were bunched together beneath a ventilator, loafing.

It is a maxim of the sea that idleness breeds trouble. I left a man to look after the burners, detailed another one to oil, and set the remaining five to work tearing up the engine-room floor-plates. As I expected, the bilges proved to be in a shocking state, and I turned the men to upon them.

They were a queer gang, that watch. All young, all active, with reckless faces and a manner of thinly veiled insolence. A tough crowd!

But I was used to tough crowds. They needed a little urging, and they got it. But their obvious surprise and resentment at being put to work nonplussed me.

IT WAS nearer one o'clock than twelve when Johnson came below to relieve me, and I was able to leave the engine-room.

I met Mr. Podd, the wireless operator, at the engine-room door. As I stepped out upon deck, I came upon that erstwhile melancholy young gentleman waving a book in his hand and in the act of executing a dance step. His final, fancy kick just missed my chin.

"Here, here!" I cried, as I dodged. "You have chosen a blame poor place for your ballet practise!"

"Oh, pardon me," said he. "My legs are uncontrollable, like my spirits. It was the expression of my temperament, Mr. McMeal."

"McNeil," I corrected. "You may take liberties with my jaw, but not with my name. And you had better indulge your temperament more temperately."

"Oh, you misjudge me, Mr. McMeal—ah, pardon, McNeil!" he cried. "It is not intemperance. I dance for joy. I have chosen!"

I stared agape. This was the young man of the lugubrious mein at the breakfast table. Now his bulging eyes glistened with pleasurable excitement, his face was vivacious, radiant!

"Well, what have you chosen?" I asked him.

"My car," he replied. "I shall expend some of my fortune upon a wonderful French car!"

He regarded me happily, waived the book in my face, and chattered on.

"Oh, I have been in a quandary, Mr. McMeal. I have dreamed of cars—dreamed of the lowly and of the lordly. But I could not decide.

"But now my doubt is settled, Mr. McMeal. It will be a French car—a great, red French car. I shall call it the 'Red Devil!'

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Did you know, Mr. McMeal, that all of the best people in America indulged in French Red Devils?"

"No, can't say that I did know it," said I.

"Yes," affirmed Mr. Podd, tapping his book. "French Red Devils with six cylinders. Here is proof. This is 'Love Rampant' by Robert C. Bambers, America's celebrated authority upon high society. All of our best people ride in French Red Devils; ergo, I shall obtain a Red Devil. Do you not think I decide wisely?"

"I think," I told him, "that you are either batty or drunk."

He laughed merrily, skipped gaily across the deck and popped into the room where his wireless apparatus was located.

"Bughouse!" I reflected, as I mounted the ladder to the bridge.

HOT SCOTCH HENDERSON had the watch upon the bridge, and he was improving his time by gossiping with the helmsman. This was a most flagrant breach of custom and discipline—an astounding one on Henderson's part, for he bore the reputation of a martinet.

I gave the helmsman a quick, critical look, as well; for, as a part of his nondescript apparel, he wore the white blouse of a sailor in the United States Navy, and upon his right arm was the insignia of a gunner's mate.

A deserter, I decided. But beyond a passing wonder as to what had caused a first-class petty officer to run for it, I thought nothing of his presence at the wheel of the *Ormsby*. Navy deserters are common upon merchant ships.

"Henderson," I tackled the mate, "how many hands have you on deck?"

Henderson gave me a sharp glance, then grinned.

"There's my watch," he said. He pointed over the bridge rail.

I looked and counted nine men scattered about the foredeck, and upon the forecastle head. Most of them were sprawled upon the forehatch, sleeping. None of them were working.

"If that is your watch," said I, "then, counting Ralder's, you have twenty men on deck?"

"Well, now, it takes an engineer for arithmetic, don't it?" commented Henderson.

"This hooker is quadruple manned," I added. "What for? Haffner doesn't hire men without a reason."

"I wonder," said Henderson.

"Why don't you set them to work?" I asked.

"I wonder," was the answer.

I gave up in disgust, and turned away. I came upon Captain Dacy in the chart-house. He was alone, and reading. He greeted me pleasantly.

"How did you find things below, McNeil?" he asked.

"Well enough, so far as the machinery goes," I replied. "The engine is a shocking sight for careful eyes, but she will run. But one thing surprises me."

He gave me his interested attention.

"I have twenty-one tough looking *hombres* in the black-gang, and there is not enough regular work upon the scrap-heap to keep a third of them busy. And I see you have about as many more men on deck."

Dacy smiled blandly.

"Oh, I forgot I had not posted you as to that," he said. "We have the forehold filled with supplies—provisions and munitions. The extra crew is to enable us to tranship the stores quickly when we come up with the Britisher."

"Oh," I said, "that is it." But I wondered what the crew of the man-o'-war would be doing while the work was in progress.

"There is one other thing I think I should tell you, Captain," I continued. "My assistant, Johnson, is a Swede; but his talk is German, and he whistles 'The Watch on the Rhine' by way of keeping himself amused. He hails from nearer Hamburg than Stockholm, or I am a farmer."

"Well," the captain laughed, "I was afraid you would fathom poor Werner. Yes, he is German. I already knew."

"Is his name not Johnson?" I asked.

"It is on this ship. He is absolutely trustworthy; I know him. But I trust you will say nothing regarding his nationality before Courtney. Courtney is absurdly prejudiced, you know. That is the reason Werner is posing as Johnson, a Swede."

"Certainly not. It is none of my business," I remarked.

"I don't think there is much danger of their seeing too much of each other," the captain added with a chuckle. "Courtney is seasick. As soon as we struck the open-water swell, he keeled over and took to his

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bunk. Fair weather, too. What he will do if it freshens up a bit, Heaven knows!"

I left the chart-house and went down to the cabin after my dinner. I ate alone, waited upon by the negro, Turk. He proved to be a merry member of his race, humming and singing as he fetched my food and served me. But I noticed that the refrain was ever the same, "Ah Doan't Know Whar Ahm Goin', But Ahm on Mah Way!"

"Yas suh," Mistah Chief," he commented, "dat's shuah one fine tune foh dis yeah ship."

"Don't you know where you are going?" I asked.

"Lawdy no—does you? If you does, you is de only man 'side de Capting an' de doctor what do know. De Capting know, an' he say it's money. Dat's good 'nuf foh li'l' Turk. Ah shuah lubs mah money!" And off he went, singing his song.

Off I went also to my bunk, to snatch a few hours' sleep before I went on watch again.

I dreamed. I dreamed a silly, foolish dream. I dreamed that a girl with yellow hair, and dancing blue eyes, and laughing lips, stood upon the dock edge and waved good-by to me as my ship pulled out. I called to her and tried to tell her many things, but the only words I could utter were, "Ah Doan't Know Whar Ahm Goin', But Ahm on Mah Way!"

VI

WHEN I went on watch again, I was not much surprised to discover that but little progress had been made in the work of cleaning the bilges. I had already gathered that, for some reason or other, work was taboo upon the *Ormsby;* that she was the foremast-hand's heaven—a workless ship.

True, when I descended the engine-room ladder, the men of the watch were making a pretense of working; but all they had accomplished in six hours could have been stowed away in a blind man's eye. Telling a stoker to work, and making him work, are two different things. Apparently Mr. Johnson had not bothered his head about seeing my orders fulfilled.

I was not surprised, but I was nettled. The manner in which my orders were being ignored or evaded was exasperating to a man of my training.

"See here, Mr. Johnson," said I, "what is the reason your watch has made such a poor showing with their work?"

"Dey do not like to work," he replied imperturbably.

"Do not like!" I cried. "Did you ever see a stoker who did like? What sort of an officer are you, to be consulting your men's tastes in work?"

My words did not trouble Mr. Johnson in the least. Indeed, I noticed the ghost of a smile beneath his warlike mustache.

"It vas foolishness—dot work," he said.

"That is none of your business," I replied. "I am chief engineer, and I have given you orders. I expect you to obey them. The reason for my orders does not concern you."

"It vas foolishness—dot work," repeated Johnson. "Vat use to make trouble with dis hell-crew."

"So—that is why!" I snorted contemptuously. "You are afraid to work the men!"

The taunt stung. Johnson straightened.

"Vat!" he exclaimed. "You say dot to me! You say dot I vas afraid of dis trash!" He waved his hand scornfully toward the gang. "*Nein, nein,* mister! I haf no fear of them. But you not understand; you not understand many things on dis ship!"

"What is it I do not understand about this ship?" I demanded.

He shook his head.

"I say noddings. But if you make dem work dere vill be trouble."

"All right," I answered. "My middle name is trouble. I say 'work.' You hear!"

I swung about upon the watch who had bunched together within ear-shot during the altercation. They were not the same men I had worked in the morning, but in appearance and bearing they were replicas of their predecessors.

"Mr. Johnson says that you men do not like to work—I say that you do," I cried. "I am going to send you into the bilges, and the man who shirks will account to me! Have you anything to say?"

"You bet we have!" was the unexpected answer, and the whole crowd moved toward me.

"Trouble!" I heard Johnson exclaim. "I ged der captain!"

"We have quite a bit to say," continued the spokesman of the gang. "The first thing is that Dutchy is right—there are

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some things you don't understand about this ship."

He was a young man, this leader, with a swarthy, intelligent, evil face. And as he spoke, I noticed that his words slipped out of the corner of his mouth through motionless lips, in the same manner that the steward's words did. His bearing was insufferably insolent.

"I understand this," I told him shortly, "that I have given you an order. You and your mates get into the bilges."

"If you want your —— bilges cleaned, do the job yourself, you big stiff!" was his level response.

My swing caught him flush upon the jaw and sent him crashing against the bulkhead, some eight feet away. He crumpled up on the floorplates and lay still.

I found myself the center of a struggling, cursing mob. But if they had numbers against me, I had no small skill in that kind of a rumpus. Their very numbers hindered them, and I smashed my way to the wrench-board.

My hand closed upon a wrench. I had long ago discovered that the heavy end of an inch-and-a-half spanner made a very good persuader in such an argument. Before my assailants knew what I was about, I had broken a couple of heads.

I knew that only aggression would save me from a bad beating, and possibly a knifing. I attacked them furiously with my weapon, and drove them before me. I won. With three of their number down, the rest gave way and hustled around the end of the engine.

I started after them, quite carried away with the exercise. I taunted them and bade them wait for more entertainment. I was enjoying myself hugely.

A curse behind me caused me to swing about. The swarthy young spokesman whose insolence had started the row, and whom I had knocked out first of all, had regained his feet. He stood steadying himself against the bulkhead, his face bloodied, his eyes blazing, and a stream of blasphemy running from his lips. With one hand he was fumbling with the breast-buttons of his dungaree jumper.

Nothing loath, I started for him. He jerked his hand away from his bosom, and I found myself staring into the muzzle of a wicked-looking automatic pistol.

I think I was near death for an instant. I saw the hate and purpose in the fellow's eyes as he drew his bead upon me.

I heard a shout from the ladder behind me. A hand grasped my shoulder, and I was hurled violently aside. A figure leaped past me.

I regained my balance and found Captain Dacy, red and angry, before me, and the phlegmatic Mr. Johnson at my side. The captain gave no attention to me; he bounded forward and wrested the gun from the stoker's hand.

"Curse you, Worden!" he cried furiously. "What do you mean? Is this the way you obey me, you dog?"

The swarthy stoker backed away. The rage and the bravado had left his face; his countenance expressed fear and terror of the man before him.

"He started it," he muttered sullenly. "He hazed us—worked us up. We ain't here to go bilge-diving for no blanked bucko."

"You scut!" the captain roared. "You were told to obey him. You know what my orders were! You fool, what do you mean by drawing that gun?"

"He was coming after me," whined Worden.

The captain looked about him. The two fellows whose heads I had cracked were sprawled at his feet, one sitting up and nursing his pate, the other still in dreamland. From the entrance to the shaft-tunnel the balance of the watch peered fearfully at us, and it was apparent that their fear was of Dacy and not of me.

The captain laughed shortly as he surveyed the scene.

"Yes," he said, "I see he was coming after you. And it looks as though he reached you." He roughly stirred the prostrate body at his feet with his boot. "You fools! You knew the sort of man you had to deal with!"

"He hazed us," answered Worden.

"Hazed you!" blazed the captain. "My orders were for you to obey him! You know his value to us!"

Worden cringed in utter abasement. He had faced me bravely enough, but before Dacy he was in a blue funk. Dacy grabbed him by the throat and shook him till his teeth rattled, and he made not the slightest attempt at resistance.

"You rat!" exclaimed the captain. "If harm had come to that man I would have

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wrung your neck with my own hands and dumped you overside!

"Here, you!" he called to the bunch in the shaft alley. "Come out here!"

They responded slowly and with evident fear of consequences. They listened docilely while Captain Dacy gave them the law.

"I give you men to understand that Mr. McNeil is to be obeyed. He is chief engineer. You will clean bilges, or do anything else he sees fit to set you at. Yes, by Heaven! You will stand upon your heads if he orders you to! And the first man who utters a peep of protest will answer to me. Now, you fools, turn to!"

They jumped in compliance. Worden in the lead, they fairly tumbled into the bilges in their eagerness to begin work. Even the two men with the broken pates were roughly seized by their fellows and dragged along.

The captain turned to me. His face was still ablaze with his anger, and when I caught a glimpse of the cold ferocity of his eyes I no longer wondered at the fear the men had shown of him. I felt a qualm myself.

"You will have no more trouble with your men, Mr. McNeil," he said.

"I am glad to hear it," I replied. "There is a queer crowd of bullies on this packet of yours, Captain."

"You will find them lambs from now on," he answered curtly; and he turned on his heel and stalked up the ladder.

"You vas young—und rash," whispered Johnson in my ear; and he followed after the captain.

WHEN I came off watch, I ate my midnight lunch alone in the cabin. Afterward, I lighted my pipe and betook myself to the deck.

The wireless was working as I emerged from the cabin. In a moment, Mr. Podd passed me on his way to the chart-house, a dispatch in his hand. I gave him good evening, and he nodded a sour, dismal reply.

I was startled by his appearance. The high spirits of the afternoon were gone; his face seemed to bear the marks of keen suffering. Indeed, as he passed beneath the light at the cabin entrance his face was like a death-mask. He was again the drooping, melancholy Podd of the breakfast table.

He ascended the ladder to the bridge and disappeared within the chart-house, where a burning lamp indicated that Dacy was still awake. I sought a quiet, shadowed spot in the lee of the fiddle, and by communing with the stars tried to discover the answer to a riddle.

Captain Dacy's prediction had come true —the men had been docile as lambs and had worked like fiends. But still I felt the victory to be a barren one.

There was something wrong about the *Ormsby*. I felt it. What it was, I could not imagine; but something was off-color, I was sure. There was a baffling, treacherous atmosphere about the ship that was getting upon my nerves.

I had been fetched aboard the ship while unconscious, without my knowledge or consent. That was all right if Dacy's explanation was true, but I felt there was something lacking in his specious yarn. On the other hand, I could not doubt Courtney's sincerity.

The ship was absurdly over-manned, and by the toughest-looking crowd I had ever gone to sea with. They were all young men —picked men. At least one, probably more, were armed with guns, an unthinkable thing at sea.

My Swede assistant was no Swede at all, but a German. We were engaged in giving aid to his country's enemy. He did not look like that kind of man. Johnson—or Werner, if that were his name—was not a tramp-steamer engineer. I reviewed what I had seen of his work. A good theoretical man, perhaps, but lacking practical experience.

And myself! Why had they been so eager to obtain my services to operate an engine that almost any intelligent man could handle. I had no doubt but that almost any man in the black-gang could handle the *Ormsby's* engine as well as I could.

"*You know his value to us*," Captain Dacy had told Worden. What the devil was my value to them?

The ship was manned by thugs. The second mate was a common thief, as was also the engineer whose arm I had broken. With such officers, what would the men be?

We were engaged in the sort of venture where taut discipline is of great importance, but there was no discipline upon the ship. I was the only officer who made any pretense of keeping the men in their place.

And it was not because the captain was weak-kneed. Dacy, himself, chummed with

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the steward; Henderson gossiped with the helmsman.

Henderson! What brought Hot Scotch aboard the *Ormsby* in a subordinate capacity? I knew Henderson. An unscrupulous rascal, a prime seaman, and a drunkard, he owed his nickname to his fondness for the drink. But Henderson had commanded his own ships for years. Why was he here as mate?

Decidedly, there was something wrong about the *Ormsby*. But still, there could be nothing wrong. The presence on board of the representative of the British Government was a guarantee that the ship was a simple contraband runner. Courtney was not the kind of a man who could lie successfully. He told the truth.

I swore and knocked the ashes from my pipe. I went to my room. I opened the door, stepped inside, and fumbled along the wall for the light switch.

The cold, steel muzzle of a revolver was pressed against the nape of my neck, and a soft voice breathed in my ear,

"Come now, be a good sport. Throw 'em up!"

VII

I DID not argue. I elevated my hands, and my hair stood up, as well. That cold steel upon my flesh seemed as big around as a German siege-gun.

For an instant, the wild thought flashed across my mind, "It's Worden!" And then the soft words in my ear dispelled the thought.

"Now, don't cry out or try any monkey business," the voice murmured. I felt a hand patting my hips and the pockets of my coat. "I'm sorry to do this, sport." The hand reached out and gently swung shut the door through which I had just stepped. "All right, sport, you can light up now. I have the port-hole covered."

The steel left my neck, to my measureless relief. After a second's hesitation I switched on the light. Then I looked around.

Crouched in the corner of the room, and regarding me from a pair of very bright eyes, was what I first took to be a small negro. Then I saw it was a little white man, blackened with coal dust. I recognized my visitor. It was the "gink" hunter!

The "gink" hunter—but what a change! Departed was his luster! When he had accosted me in front of Haffner's office door, and again when I had met him pestering Courtney upon the street corner, he had been arrayed as Solomon in his glory.

Now, his fine feathers were frayed. The cream-colored suit was rent in divers places and covered with coal grime. He was hatless, and his hair straggled forlornly every which way. His face and hands were black.

He looked a laughable wreck; but in one hand he held a big, blue-steeled revolver. He swung it easily at his hip, after the fashion of a man who is accustomed to using a gun; and his eyes met mine with the same impudent twinkle he had shown the day before.

"Now, don't get hostile, sport," he said. He waggled the gun suggestively. "Just sit down, Mr. McNeil, and listen to me for a jiffy. I'm your friend."

"You have a blamed queer way of showing it," I answered, "shoving that thing down the back of my neck in the dark. Who are you?"

"Just a jiffy," he said. "Won't you sit down?"

"Why, seeing that this is my own room, don't mind if I do," I replied.

I perched myself upon the edge of the bunk, and he gingerly seated himself upon the only chair.

"Ah, now we can talk comfortably," he remarked.

"Glad to see you making yourself at home," I told him. "But now that you are settled, suppose you tell me what this gun-play means. Who the devil are you? What do you want?"

"Oh, come now, be a good guy—don't get sore," he smiled. "Give me your promise, Mr. McNeil, to let me have a little talk with you, and I'll put this toy out of sight."

"Yes," I said. "Who told you my name?"

My caller pocketed his revolver and leaned back comfortably in the chair.

"I was sorry to have to stick you up that way, sport, but it was my only chance. You were the guy I had to see, and I was afraid that if you turned on the light and found me in your room, you would make a rough-house and attract attention. I just had to guard against that."

"Oh, you did," said I. "You don't belong to this ship. Where do you come from?"

"The life-boat," he answered. "I've had

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a swell room in the Hotel de Life-Boat since this boat started, last night."

"I suppose you are still looking for your 'gink'?" I inquired with sarcasm.

"Ain't he the elusive guy, now?" he grinned.

"You seem to know my name," I said, "but I can't seem to recall your name."

He smiled and bobbed his head at me in a friendly fashion.

"I've known you by name, Mr. McNeil, for a little over twenty-four hours. But I have been your friend for a much longer time—for about three years. You have quite a number of friends whom you do not know, Mr. McNeil."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "That is pleasant news. Sort of fairy godmothers, I suppose."

"Sorry I left my cards home on the piano, but my name is Archibald McEnery Dooin, at your service."

Archibald McEnery Dooin! I searched my memory at the sound of the barbarous string. I had never heard it before, I was sure.

"You are new one on me," I told him.

Yet somehow, as I gazed at the little man —at his dirty face and friendly smile and bright, inquisitive eyes—I felt a warmth in my breast as for an old friend. There was a trustworthy air about Archibald McEnery Dooin.

"Well, Mr. Dooin," I said, "now that we know each other, suppose you proceed with your little talk."

"I guess," said Mr. Dooin, "that there are some queer sports on this boat?"

"A good guess," I replied. "I'm looking at one now. But your explanation, man! How did you come aboard? What's your game?"

"I came on the same tug you did." Mr. Dooin glanced ruefully at his clothes. "I rode in the coal-bunker. I followed them when they carried you out of the joint on Dock Street. It was dark, and I got aboard the tug all right. When we got out to this boat, I passed for one of the gang. It was dark, and most them were drunk. When I got aboard, I crawled under the canvas covering of a life-boat. Been there ever since—plenty of water, but nothing but sea-bread to eat."

"You seem to be interested in my movements," I remarked. "Were you in Meyer's place during the fight?"

"I was outside." He glanced at me keenly. "I don't know how they got you, but I saw Captain Roger Dacy slip a couple of bank-notes to a flat-faced gink with an apron on, and heard him say, 'You did a good job.'"

"That is interesting news," I said.

Mr. Dooin studied my face for a moment, then he leaned forward in his chair and lowered his voice.

"Mr. McNeil, do you remember Lathrop Moore?"

Lathrop Moore! Before my eyes came a picture—a clearing in the jungle, a grass hut, a gaunt and fever-stricken white man, who lay on a rattan pallet and laughed at Life and laughed at Death and played the game. We were a long ways from Hayti, and three years is a long time in an adventurer's life, but those wild days in the Black Republic were graven too deeply upon my memory to be ever forgotten.

"Lathrop Moore!" I stammered. "What do you know of Lathrop Moore?"

Dooin extended his left hand in silence. Eagerly I bent my gaze upon his ring-finger. It was adorned with an ordinary gold signet-ring. He turned his hand palm-up. There, upon the thin strip of gold, I found what I sought—what Lathrop Moore had shown and explained to me—the tiny insignia of the Department of Justice.

"You are an agent!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," said Dooin. "And now you know how I got a line on you, Mr. McNeil. You are pretty well known to us fellows in the service for what you did for Moore, down there in Hayti."

"Oh, that was nothing," said I.

"You may call it nothing—us fellows think it was pretty good—sticking by a sick man when those Voodoo jaspers had given him notice, and warding off poison and knives and what not. We thought it was a pretty nifty thing to do, and it was quite a comfort to me while I was laying in that life-boat to know that a game sport like you was around."

"Well, I am really glad to meet you," I said, shaking hands with him. "Any friend of Lathrop Moore's is my friend. But, what is your lay? You are not after me, are you?"

"No. I am working on a case, and the trail led me aboard this vessel. You are mixed up in it."

"I am," I said. "Do you know anything

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about this ship? Oh, I pledge you my support—I don't care what your case is. I was shanghaied aboard here, and I am in honor bound to nobody. I have seen enough of this ship to wish I were safe ashore. There is something queer about the *Ormsby*, though I can't lay a name to my suspicions."

"Well," said Dooin, "I am going to tell you about this case of mine, and then we can compare notes."

"OF COURSE, you know Wilbur Oates?" commenced Dooin.

"You mean the big Wall Street man?" I asked. "Wilbur Oates, the multimillionaire?"

"Yep, that's the gink. Wilbur Oates, the Wolf of Wall Street, President of the Three-State Trust Company, and the slickest get-rich-quick artist before the public!"

"Well, I don't know him very well," I said. "He was pointed out to me one time on the street. He was in a limousine, and I was afoot."

"Well, he is the guy I'm after."

"He is not aboard this ship," said I.

"No, but his trail led me here."

Mr. Dooin was silent for a moment, evidently arranging his story in his mind. Then he leaned forward in his chair and spoke earnestly, with hardly a trace of his former flippant manner.

"You know, McNeil, just about what our service is. We are not much advertised, but your work for Moore in Hayti will have given you an insight to our work and methods.

"We belong to the Department of Justice, you know. We are the lads who work up the cases against the big financial men who think more of a dollar then they do of the law. We get busy when the Treasury and Post-Office men are stumped. Of course, most of our work is strictly confidential, and the public never hears of it.

"Well, Wilbur Oates was passed up to us some time ago. He first came into notice when he promoted some land deals in Florida and sold city lots that were under ten feet of water. The Post-Office guys tried to get him, but he slipped through their fingers.

"We have had an eye upon him ever since. But he is slick. We know he is a crook, but we can't catch the goods on him. He just skirts the inside edge of the letter of the law.

"Well, two days ago we were given a tip. It was given us by one of the State Department boys who was working on a little case that concerned a man named Judson Haffner—you know him, I believe; a shipping agent with a shady reputation."

"Shady! You do him an injustice," I exclaimed. "Haffner is the choicest blackleg in the business!"

"Yes, probably," continued Dooin. "The case didn't amount to much—just looking into the shipment of arms into Mexico. But the tip we received seemed important. It was to the effect that Haffner and Wilbur Oates had suddenly become intimate friends. They visited each other frequently.

"The tip was handed to me. It seemed to me that this sudden intimacy would bear investigation. I commenced yesterday morning. I followed Oates, and he led me to Meyer's place in Brooklyn. Say, what do you know about this guy, Dacy?"

"Nothing," I replied. "I met him for the first time yesterday afternoon in Haffner's office. But he is a bad man to monkey with. He has the bunch on this ship bluffed to a standstill."

"I don't know much about him, myself," said Dooin. "I unearthed a rumor that he was just arrived from the Chinese coast. I asked the Department for a report, but up to last night I had not received it.

"Well, Oates went to Meyer's place and met Dacy. They had a conference in the back room that I would have very much liked to attend. I discovered that Dacy had a crew of men there at Meyer's, apparently waiting for a ship. I discovered something else— Say, isn't there a little jasper who wears glasses and talks like a college professor out of one corner of his mouth somewhere on this ship?"

"Yes," I answered. "He is the steward. Though between us two, he isn't any more a steward than my grandmother is. He doesn't pretend to do any work. Captain Dacy chums with him; calls him 'Doctor.'

"That is Doctor Farley," said Dooin. "He is number three. He came into Meyer's and joined Oates and Dacy in the consultation in the back room. As soon as I saw him I knew I was on a warm scent.

"Doctor Farley is a professional crook. He is one of the best mobsmen in the country; he can think of more ways of relieving the hick from his coin than can a dozen ordinary crooks."

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"He was much interested in the crack I received on the head," I stated. "Is he a real doctor?"

"Yes, and a very good one. He was convicted of some malpractise and did a long jolt in Sing Sing. That's why he talks out of the corner of his mouth—that is as sure a mark of the old convict, as the lame gait was that the lock-step used to leave. Farley is a shrewd, desperate, out - and - out criminal."

"He is not the only man aboard who talks that way," I broke in, thinking of Worden. "I have a fellow in my gang who has the same trick of speech. He tried to kill me a few hours ago."

"There are a dozen or more of his kind upon the ship," stated Dooin. "Half of that gang in Meyer's were friends of Farley. They are part of this crew.

"After the meeting in the back room was concluded, Oates and Dacy went to Haffner's office in New York. Dacy stayed there and Oates returned to his office in Nassau Street. I hung around Haffner's office, and you appeared; also, that guy from the British Consulate. You were followed from the time you left Haffner's until you reached your home in Brooklyn."

"I was!" exclaimed I. "Then you saw the rumpus on West Street before the Black Star docks?"

"Yes," he answered. "That is where I learned your name. You told it yourself—you have a bad habit of taking the air into your confidence. You stood on the curbing and called yourself shocking names."

"Then you saw the girl I helped," I stated.

"Yes, I was across the street. Some quick, nifty work on your part! Rather a good-looking girl, too."

"Rather good-looking!" I snorted. "She is the most beautiful creature I ever saw! Man, man, did you notice her eyes?"

"No, I didn't have your chance, you know."

"They were blue, deep-sea blue, and full of life—and smiling, and——"

"Yes, yes," he interrupted dryly, "wonderful eyes, no doubt. Fine girl, sure. But she isn't in the case, you know. She didn't interest me."

I subsided, wondering what sort of a cold-blooded fish the man was.

"After seeing you safely to your boarding place, I gave my attention to Courtney. Of course, I scented contraband in the juxtaposition of the British Consulate and Haffner's shipping agency, and I tipped off one of the Treasury guys I met. He told me about this ship. He said there was little doubt about the contraband, but that the papers were all O. K. and that they could do nothing. The boat is cleared for Barcelona, Spain, with oil and merchandise."

"She is bound for a British man-o'-war," I told him. "Courtney is aboard."

"I know; he delivered up his breakfast and his prayers near my hiding-place, this morning.

"Well, I didn't connect the *Ormsby* with Wilbur Oates, and Farley, and Dacy. I couldn't see what Oates and Farley could have to do with the British Government. In fact, I discovered that Courtney knew nothing whatever of Oates. I thought this *Ormsby* business was just one of Haffner's regular ventures, and had nothing to do with the case of Wilbur Oates. But Oates is interested in this ship—although the English Government does not suspect it. What his interest is, I don't know, but his men Dacy and Farley are aboard. I am gambling that it is an illegal interest.

"I was outside the saloon when they carried you out, and I followed them. I did not even have a chance to warn my people in New York of what I was doing; I am playing a lone hand."

"You can depend upon my help," I assured him.

"Thank you. I may need it—and then, I may be running a fool's race. So far I haven't collected a scrap of evidence against Oates, of the sort I am after. Suppose you tell me all you know about this bunch. Just how did you come to be mixed up in this?"

Dooin settled back in the chair, and I told him about Haffner's note, my interview with Haffner and Dacy and my visit to Dock Street.

"I thought that scrap was a put-up job," I remarked. "I saw Dacy in the doorway as I was struck down, and he was smiling. Your seeing Dacy give money to the bartender is pretty strong proof that they deliberately planned to shanghai me."

I told him about my experiences aboard the *Ormsby* during the day just past.

"The ship is over-manned forward and undermanned aft. There are over forty men in the forecastles—all hard citizens.

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That is an absurd number for a ship of this size and class. There are only two engineers, counting myself, and two mates, aft. The first mate is Hot Scotch Henderson, a drunkard and a hard case. The second mate is a thief."

I disclosed that Ralder was one of the men concerned in the West Street purse-snatching incident. Then I recounted the fight I had had with the stokers in the engine-room.

"Dacy practically saved my life," I told him. "But his reason was no love of me, or any desire to maintain discipline. There is no discipline on the ship. He damned Worden for pulling the gun because I would be a loss to the ship. 'You know his value to us!' he said. Why should I be valuable to them. The only thing I know is my trade—and they haven't got a decent piece of machinery on the ship. I don't see why they should have gone to the trouble to shanghai me. Any second or third-class man could have taken charge of the *Ormsby's* engines!"

"Those jaspers don't do anything without a good reason," commented Dooin.

"My assistant in the engine-room is a German masquerading as a Swede for Courtney's benefit. That seems strange in a ship going to a British war vessel. He is an educated man—the kind they call 'gentleman' in the old country. Unless I miss my guess, he is a German navy man."

"Blamed queer," said Dooin.

"There seems to be some sort of a common interest between all hands, forward and aft. I don't know what it is."

"Something is rotten," stated Dooin. "Something crooked is going on, and Wilbur Oates is behind it. Dacy and Farley are the active heads. Whatever may be the real charterer of this ship, the British Government is in ignorance of it. Courtney knows nothing of Oates. But something is rotten!"

"Something surely is," I agreed. "What is your theory? What have you deduced?"

Dooin grinned derisively.

"You have been reading Mr. Doyle. Theories don't count for much in my business outside of books. Sherlock Holmes wouldn't last very long in the Department of Justice."

"But surely you have some theory—some idea?"

"Oh, sure. I made a quick guess and took a chance. That's the way we work. And I think my chance will pan out well."

We talked for a long time; talked till the gray tinge in the sky betokened approaching daylight. We went over our experiences again with no definite result. I suggested that the *Ormsby* might be carrying recruits to the British vessel, but Dooin scoffed.

"I saw most of the gang in Meyer's place," he said. "Half of them, at least, are ex-convicts. They are American crooks—I doubt if there is an Englishman in the crowd. They would have no place for them upon a war-ship.

"All we can do for the present is lay low. Keep your ears and eyes as wide open as possible. There is a wireless aboard?"

"Yes," I replied. "The operator is bughouse, I think."

"That may help us," he said. "Now, I guess I had better get back to my hiding-place. My presence on board must not be suspected—not until we know what the game is, at least."

"I don't think you could have chosen a safer place in which to conceal yourself," I told him.

"Not the first time I've stowed away," he answered. "Say, McNeil, you know I'm kind of a handsome gink when I'm clean. You couldn't treat me to some soap and water, could you?"

He made the appeal with wobegone earnestness and regarded his smutty hands and ruined clothes with much disfavor. I turned out the light and went to the fiddle and obtained a bucket of water for him. I also raided the night lunch on the cabin table, and after Dooin had washed himself he tackled the food voraciously. Sea-bread is a poor diet.

He stuffed the remains of the repast into his pockets. I gave him a blanket from my bunk, assured myself that the coast was clear and gave him a boost to the boat skids. In a moment his soft whisper told me that he had regained his retreat in safety.

Then I turned into my bunk to snatch forty winks before I should be due on watch again.

TO BE CONTINUED

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In Letters Of Purple

by Stephen Allen Reynolds

"The Man with the D. S. O.," "A Flier in Steel," "61° N. 61° W.," etc.

"THAT same party's outside again this morning, sir. Says he'll come here every day for a month till he sees you in person."

President Grunwald, middle-aged, portly and prosperous, looked up at his secretary.

"He's certainly persevering," he grunted.

The secretary nodded.

"Today makes the sixth day he's been hanging around the offices."

The head of the Grunwald Oat-Malt Company Ltd. pushed aside a pile of weekly sales reports and leaned far back in his tilting chair—so far back that his confidential man grew apprehensive lest there should come a spill.

"What's he want, anyway?"

"I couldn't say exactly, sir. It's got something to do with booming the sales of Oat-Malt—some novel form of advertising that he won't tell me about."

"Why didn't you sic him on to Stratton?"

The secretary smiled.

"I did," he answered. "Stratton saw him for a moment and then 'phoned me that the old chap was cracked. Then the visitor came back here and told me that our advertising manager was a fool—that he didn't know a good thing even after it was explained to him."

The president thought for a moment, a far-away look in his greenish-blue eyes. It was an easy matter to rid the premises of such a nuisance. A mere whisper to the superintendent of the building would be sufficient. Stratton's judgment was unerring; never as yet had he found it at fault.

"Poor devil!" grunted the president as he jerked himself erect. His pudgy forefinger shot out toward a row of pearl push-buttons, and he was on the point of pressing one of them when a thought occurred to him.

"He's not a dangerous crank, is he?" he snapped. "Not armed, or anything like that?"

"No, sir," smiled the secretary. "He's a mild-mannered man, well along in years. He's dressed rather neatly too. Seems as if he might have been a man of——"

"Show him in. I'll see him for a minute," directed the other.

John Grunwald was a shrewd man. He had learned much from fools in his time, and knew that no man would hound him for a week without a definite object in view. A multimillionaire himself, liable to attacks from money-seeking cranks, he rarely gave personal interviews to strangers. Yet he felt quite safe. Between his seat—back to the window—and the chair which his visitor would occupy, lay four feet of polished mahogany—the width of his flat-topped desk. Besides, convenient to his right hand, in a specially constructed drawer which opened by merely touching a button, lay a fully loaded and cocked automatic weapon

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of generous caliber. Then again, his secretary would be at the visitor's elbow watching for the least suspicious action.

Even at that the interview would not have been granted had not the secretary hinted something about a novel form of advertisement. Printers' ink had made John Grunwald a wealthy man. Advertising had made Grunwald's Oat-Malt a household word throughout the land, a breakfast necessity. Children called for it; adults grumbled when they had to go without it; physicians prescribed it for anemic patients.

The magic words, "Eat Grunwald's Oat-Malt" stared at one from theater program and billboard, from rural fence and barn roof, from urban journal and magazine. A herd of elephants draped with purple-and-gold banners advertising the immortal cereal had tramped from coast to coast. At enormous expense a huge stereopticon had been devised to throw the Oat-Malt advertisement upon the sacred face of Niagara Falls. Two Governments had been forced to take action. And John Grunwald chuckled as he had footed the bills, for the notoriety meant greater sales for Oat-Malt—more money for him in the end.

He would have given a million to the man who could show him how to set the world by the ears just as readily as he would have tossed a dollar to a waiter. Advertising was his hobby; Stratton, his highest-salaried employee.

The door opened softly, interrupting the cereal king's reflections.

"ARE you President Grunwald?" timidly began his visitor, a slightly built person with bulging brows, kindly blue eyes, and flowing white mustache and imperial.

"I am," replied the Oat-Malt magnate as he shot a curious glance at the other. "And I'm a mighty busy man, too," he went on; "too busy to give you more than a minute. What do you mean by insisting upon seeing me? What's your scheme?"

Yankee-like, the insistent one replied with a question.

"How'd you like to have an Oat-Malt announcement in big letters of brilliant purple spread all over every page of the *Morning Earth*—the ad to read from left to right, or sometimes from the bottom of the page upward, running right on top of the reading matter?"

John Grunwald smiled.

The New York *Morning Earth* had the largest morning circulation of any daily newspaper in the two Americas. A single-page advertisement in its daily edition cost seven hundred and fifty dollars; a page in the Sunday issue set back the purchaser an even thousand. And the advertising manager of the *Earth* was very strict about reading notices, firm against extravagant cuts and unusual type, adamant whenever the subject of colored inks came up.

"It's good business, but it can't be done," pronounced Grunwald as he glanced significantly at his stenographer-secretary.

"Your minute is up," warned the master of curves and pothooks.

He was about to lay his hand upon the coat sleeve of the visitor when the latter took a pace forward and declared with emphasis:

"But I say it *can* be done. If you'll give me another minute I'll show you how."

John Grunwald was a good judge of men. For an instant he looked deep into the light-blue eyes of the other.

"He's sane, clever, and honest—needs money," reflected the cereal king.

"Do I get the minute?" asked the caller.

"Are you connected in any way with the *Earth?*" demanded Grunwald.

"That's got nothing to do with the proposition. You don't even need to know my name. My proposal, briefly stated, is this: Give me the text for a series of short ads, none of them to run over twenty-five letters. I'll see that each and every copy of the *Earth* has these ads in purple letters about an inch high. If you make the text shorter — simply 'Crunwald's Oat-Malt,' for instance— I can have the letters much larger. These ads will run up and down the page—on every page. Sometimes the text may not be complete on one page; in that case the balance of the ad will appear on the next page. I'd suggest that you——"

"And where do you come in?" broke in the inventor of Oat-Malt. "Supposing that this can be done. What do you want?"

"I want a thousand dollars a day for each day the purple ad appears—payable in cash, *after* I've shown you that I mean business."

"It'd be cheap at two thousand a day, if you *could* work it," declared the president. "But how about all the other newspapers in the United States? Could you run the same ad in them?" Grunwald's inquiry was

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sarcastic, although he chuckled inwardly at the thought of the purple ad screaming its message in every daily in the country.

The visitor wagged his gray head.

"Can't be done," he said. "I can only work this scheme with the *Earth*. Even then I doubt if I can guarantee the thing to last more than ten days or a fortnight."

The speaker paused and fingered his shiny-brimmed derby. John Grunwald puckered his brows and toyed with a paperweight. Fully a minute passed before he delivered his opinion. It was final.

"I'll be candid with you, my friend," he began. "I don't say that you can't work this scheme, you understand—maybe you can. But I will say that I never work in the dark with any one. I've got to see the wheels go round. I'll willingly pay you two thousand a day—in gold, if you want it—for every day you can show me a purple Oat-Malt ad in the *Earth;* but unless you tell me how you're going about it—" and here a heavy fist thumped the mahogany—"you'll never touch a dollar of my money! That's my ultimatum!"

For a few seconds the visitor wavered. Disappointment seemed written upon his care-worn features. And then he approached the edge of the desk, leaned over, and whispered a few words to the bald-headed breakfast-food man—words that were significant.

Secretary Kelly did not catch the words, but he eyed his chief in astonishment, for scarcely had the stranger ceased to whisper before President Grunwald's eyebrows went up and a delighted grin distorted his smug features.

"Great business! Go on! Go on!" exclaimed the cereal king as he leaned forward.

Kelly, amazed at the sudden change, stepped forward that he might listen, but was doomed to disappointment.

"Get Stratton down here on the jump!" ordered Grunwald before the stranger had had a chance to resume. "Tell him to step lively, show him in, and then leave us alone."

During the next two hours President Grunwald denied himself to all callers. What transpired in his private office that forenoon was known to but three persons: his advertising manager, the stranger, and himself. At intervals, Kelly and the clerks in the outer office heard sounds from within—sounds as of boisterous laughter.

Just before twelve, President Grunwald summoned Kelly and sent him to the bank post-haste for a thousand dollars in currency. And promptly at one o'clock the three occupants of the private office went out to lunch—together.

II

JENNISON, the fifty-thousand-dollars-a-year managing editor of the *Morning Earth*, was dreaming peacefully of polite city editors, abstemious reporters, winged copy boys, and truthful press agents, when the insistent buzz of the extension 'phone at his bedside drove him from his journalistic Eden to face life as it really was.

Feeling instinctively that he had not had his usual seven hours of uninterrupted sleep, his heavy eyes sought the clock. It still lacked a half-hour to nine. Wrathfully he he grasped the receiver.

"I thought I told you a dozen times *never* to connect this apartment before nine," he grumbled into the transmitter. He was about to say more to the girl at the switchboard below, but as he paused for breath she replied sweetly—

"Wouldn't have dreamed of disturbing you, sir, but Mr. Wagner called up and asked me to tell you to report at the office as soon as possible."

Horatio Wagner owned ninety-eight per cent. of the stock of The *Earth* Publishing Company. Horatio Wagner was the only person in the world to whom Managing Editor Jennison was accountable.

"Mr. Wagner!" repeated Jennison. "What's it about? What's up?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say," came back over the wire. "All he said was for me to tell you to come down at once. All the staff are to be there. He's awfully mad about something—judging by the sound of his voice."

Ringing for his Japanese servant, Jennison then tore off his pajamas whilst doing some lively thinking. For five years he had had his own way with the *Earth*, and during that period the "Old Man" had roused him from slumber but twice. An inquiry in connection with the sinking of the *Titanic* accounted for one interruption; a bitter "call down" for running a certain society story had occasioned the other. Wondering if a story of international importance had

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"broken" while he slept, Jennison called up successively the *City News* and the "A. P."

"Nothing doing," was the consensus of opinion of the two news-gathering organizations; whereupon the managing editor struggled into a fresh shirt, completed a hasty toilet, and entered a taxi.

"I'm sure I can't account for it," Brennan, the advertising manager, was saying when Jennison burst into the room where the Old Man was wont to kill an hour or two a day over the editorial page layout.

"What do you know about this, Mr. Jennison?" demanded the owner of the *Earth*, as he pointed to a newspaper spread out before him.

The managing editor drew nearer and perceived that the paper in question was a copy of the *Earth* dated that morning. Yet there was something unusual about it, for running up and down through the center of the front page was a line of purple characters. Twisting his head sidewise, Jennison read:

"WATCH THE PURPLE LETTERS. WATCH"

"And look at the inside pages!" snapped the irate owner. "The same idiotic thing's on every one of them!"

And it was. In letters—possibly not so vivid in color as the ones on the front page—Jennison read: "THE PURPLE LETTERS. WATCH THE" in all its combinations. Every page bore its slogan.

"I don't understand it," declared the managing editor. "If Mr. Brennan has contracted for such a disfiguring and entirely unprecedented ad, he's done so without consulting me."

"But I swear I don't know a thing about it," protested the unhappy Brennan. "I never saw the ad till half an hour ago. I was coming down to business a little early, and took a surface car so's to get the air. I opened my paper to see if certain changes were made in the Thompson-Jansen ad, when all of a sudden these purple letters seemed to slap me in the face."

"And I put the paper to bed last night," supplemented the city editor. "There was no such freak ad in the advance papers that came up to my desk. I can swear to that."

"Maybe the men in the pressroom have rigged up some kind of an auxiliary type wheel," ventured Jennison.

"We thought of that," said the city editor. "Kayser's going over every web press in the basement."

Even as he ceased speaking, the veteran pressroom foreman knocked at the door.

"There's nothin' wrong with the presses," he reported. "Neither is there any such colored ink as that on the premises. The purple we use on the multicolor is far lighter and softer. I can swear that I was on duty till near three this morning and that durin' that time there was no such ad run off any of our presses."

"Maybe the *Consolidated News* are putting over some kind of a stunt on us," ventured Brennan. "They wholesale the *Earth* all over town. It's barely possible that they've run our papers through a rapid press before getting them to the stands."

"Nonsense!" snorted the indignant owner. "The secret of this ad lies right here in this building. It's probably in the pressroom. I want you to get to the bottom of it without delay. If it happens again there'll be several vacancies on this staff. Telephone me at home just as soon as you've found out who's responsible."

With these words Horatio Wagner stalked out of the room and made his way to the elevator shaft, leaving a dismayed group behind him.

"It seems they aired the Old Man's papers this morning as usual, and then laid them out on the breakfast table—the *Earth* on top. He was just about to dig into a grapefruit when he spotted the purple letters. The wires have been hot ever since." The city editor chuckled in spite of himself, as he picked up the disfigured copy of the *Earth* and concluded, "Beautiful shade of purple, isn't it?"

Mystified, perplexed beyond measure, the several members of the *Earth's* business and editorial staff continued their fruitless discussion. Later in the forenoon, after an unsatisfactory inquiry in the basement pressroom, Jennison and the city editor summoned a taxi and scoured the city. As they feared, at each news-stand having on hand unsold copies of the *Earth*, the purple letters glared at them from the uppermost copy of the bundled "returns."

"I'll promise you *one* thing," muttered the city editor, as they headed back toward the *Earth* Building, "there'll be no purple letters in tomorrow's edition—even if I

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have to put a Pinkerton back of each press. I'm going to let my assistant hold down the desk while I keep an eye on Kayser. Much as I like him, I can't help but think that this business is some kind of a pressroom conspiracy."

"And I'm going to be on the job myself," declared the managing editor. "I sha'n't go home till the city edition is all off the presses."

NOR did he. Until nearly daylight the next morning, Jennison paced the asphalt before the row of quadruple perfecting-presses, watching with zealous eyes the printing of the *Morning Earth*. Behind the roaring presses, stationed in the narrow alley between the whitewashed wall and the line of "webs," stood Riley, the city editor. As the grimy mechanics clamped the curved plates upon the impression cylinders, either Jennison or Riley peered over their shoulders to see that all was regular.

And Kayser was equally alert. Swinging from platform to platform of the double-deckers, the old foreman seemed to be everywhere at once. Now at the elbow of an apprentice, now conferring with Jennison, very little went on in the pressroom unseen by Kayser.

From the time of the threading of the first web of paper through No. 1, for the mail edition, until the last city-edition press ceased to revolve, the three men kept up their vigil. And all seemed well. Pure and white the big ribbons of wood pulp flowed into the maws of the hungry machines. Black and white—without purple disfigurement—the pasted and folded *Earths* hopped out upon the delivery boards.

"Nipped the scheme in the bud," observed Jennison as he was about to leave Riley at the Subway. "Now all we'll have to do is to keep our eyes peeled and do a little detective work. The Old Man'll never get any rest until we find out who's responsible."

"I wonder what the purple letters would have said if the game had gone on," mused the city editor.

"Oh, we'd have watched the purple letters for about three days, and then be advised to use somebody's soap—maybe pills, or a safety razor."

Dawn was just breaking as Jennison left the Subway at Times Square and headed for a chop-house. He was weary and heavy-eyed and hungry. Ordering a brace of chops and a pot of coffee, he settled back in his window-seat and devoted himself to his pile of morning papers. It was broad daylight before the man brought in his food, yet within the brief space of time required to broil a chop, Jennison had scanned with a critical eye the contents of his seven morning contemporaries.

Fork in hand, the famished managing editor was about to attack a baked potato, when he saw something that made him fairly gasp. He dropped the mealy tuber; laid down his fork, and picked up his copy of the *Morning Earth*. The paper was one of the late city edition, fresh from the press. With his own hands Jennison had taken it from a heap upon the delivery board. With his own hands he had folded the paper up and had thrust it into his pocket. With his own eyes, during his fifteen-minute Subway trip, he had scanned all twenty of its pages. And he could have sworn that this particular copy was innocent of freakish ads or colored announcements.

Yet upon the front page, running from the bottom to the top of the fourth column, right over the printed story of an exclusive interview with a foreign celebrity, the unbelieving eyes of the managing editor read in letters of purple:

"GOOD FOR ADULTS. GOOD FOR CHILDREN. GOOD"

With trembling fingers Jennison turned to the inside pages. The purple letters—a shade fainter, possibly—were there; the text about the same.

For the next five minutes the managing editor did some rapid thinking. Then, thinking that Riley had had ample time to reach his home, he sprang for a telephone.

"Busy, sir; shall I call you?" was all the satisfaction he got.

Slamming back the receiver, Jennison left the booth and paid his score.

"Old Man Wagner's on the job already," he mused as he sent his chops back to be warmed up.

Kings are shot, steamers sink, and cities burn; yet newspaper men must eat.

III

"McADAMS & SONS want us to cancel their contract unless we'll guarantee 'em a clean page free from this purple abomination."

Brennan, the advertising manager of the

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Earth, waved a letter at Jennison, and then continued:

"And there's a line of people down-stairs asking for refunds and repeats on paid situation wanted ads. Those purple words, 'IT MAKES THE STRONG STRONGER,' run right over the addresses and box numbers in one of the situation wanted columns."

It was the third busy day for the editorial and business staff of the *Earth*, and all newspaperdom was agog over the surreptitious purple announcements, appearing daily in the heretofore thoroughly respectable *Earth*. The public looked upon the ads as a bit of freakish ill-advised work on the part of some enterprising publicity man who had persuaded the *Earth* to deviate from its usual orbit. The purple letters interfered with its reading. Gentlemen of the press—"in the know," as usual—through "column conductors" and semi-serious editorials, poked fun at the unhappy staff of the big daily.

Jennison thanked his stars that the Old Man had been summoned to Bermuda to join Mrs. Wagner. True, Horatio Wagner would see the *Morning Earth* daily during his absence, and would use the cable unsparingly, but that was much better than a personal wigging.

"What'll we do?" asked Brennan.

"Write McAdams & Sons that this won't last forever," advised Jennison. "Say that if they'll take three columns on each side of their regular page, that that'll leave the center columns free for the purple runner. After we put a stop to this business they can make up their regular dummy."

"How about the people downstairs?"

"Satisfy 'em. Give 'em their money back, or repeat their ads. That'll be the easiest way." Jennison thumbed down the tobacco in his briar and felt for a match.

"S'pose you're right," said Brennan as he turned to leave. "We've got to keep on the right side of the public at all hazards."

Upon the morning of the fourth day of the purple announcements, the reading public was advised through the columns of the *Earth* that—

"IT MAKES THE SICK WELL."

"It's neither a soap nor a safety razor," mused Jennison as he surveyed the brilliant lettering running along the central column of each page of the *Earth*. "When these preliminary announcements are over, and we get the name of the article, patent medicine or whatever it turns out to be, I'll make somebody sweat for it."

Upon the morning of the fifth day the cat was out of the bag. In letters fully twice the size of the previous announcements, each page of the *Earth* bore the purple slogan—

"EAT GRUNWALD'S OAT-MALT"

"I might have known that John Grunwald was at the bottom of this business," reflected the angry managing editor as he hastened toward the Oat-Malt headquarters with a vague idea of punching some one's head.

Grunwald ordered Jennison to be shown right in. There was a broad grin on the cereal man's face as he waved the managing editor to a chair.

"I suppose you're here to get me to stop that purple ad?" he began.

"You've hit the nail on the head," agreed Jennison.

"And that you're willing to make certain concessions if I do."

"Right again." Jennison smiled in spite of himself as he continued, "What can we do for you in order to get you to call this purple affair off?"

"It's got to run for ten days—that'll be five days more."

"And then——"

"And then I'll call the scheme off if you'll sign a contract agreeing to give all my advertising matter preferred positions—opposite editorial page, next to reading matter, top o' the page, and so forth."

Jennison thought for a moment before replying.

"Five days more," he mused. "That's bad, but it might be worse." Yet there was no other way out of the predicament.

"And how long do you want us to give you these preferred positions?"

"One year will suit me. I'm not a hog."

"You're on! Make out your agreement and send it over. We'll sign. Now tell me about these purple ads. You've fooled the smartest detectives in New York so far. How'd you work it?"

But John Grunwald was not telling tales out of school. He refused to be either bribed, cajoled or threatened into divulging his secret, and Jennison was obliged to leave the Oat-Malt offices with his curiosity

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unsatisfied. Yet in a measure he was content, for the nuisance was soon to be abated. Five days more, and all would be well.

Two days passed by, and in spite of certain red-hot cable messages from Bermuda, Jennison breathed easier. But three days remained—three days of trouble and anxiety—the *Earth* would doubtless return to its orbit. Then came George W. Burleigh, of Pulpville, New York, who asked for an immediate interview.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Burleigh?" inquired the managing editor after the old paper-maker had been ushered into his presence. George Burleigh had supplied the *Earth* with paper for years and years.

"I want an equitable contract," was the calm reply of the gray-headed man seated upon the edge of a chair.

"Explain yourself."

"I have a three-year contract with the *Earth* to supply it with paper. This contract has still nearly eight months to run. The contract was made when wood-pulp was comparatively low in price. I figured low—just a six per cent. profit to keep the mill running and the hands employed. About a year ago pulp commenced to go up. There's a big mortgage on my mill. I had to pay the interest. It came hard. I——"

"But what has all this got to do with the *Earth?*" interrupted Jennison.

"I'll show you in a minute. I wrote both you and Mr. Wagner that I was losing a little over two dollars on every ton of paper delivered in New York; that to complete the contract meant ruin for me. D'you remember the reply you sent me?"

"I believe I do," replied Jennison thoughtfully. "I spoke to Mr. Wagner about the matter, and he told me to write you that the *Earth* expected you to live up to your contract; that your personal affairs did not concern us, and that you would forfeit your bond unless you completed the contract."

"Exactly!" George Burleigh waxed sarcastic. "And you're the man that gets fifty thousand a year for writing those beautiful editorials about brotherly love—'Am I my brother's keeper?'—'Sleep with your windows open'—'Be kind to the poor'——"

"Hold on a minute!" broke in Jennison. Big-hearted though busy, he did not relish being held responsible for denying the old man's appeal. "All big contracts for paper and machinery are subject to Wagner's approval," he went on. "I don't pay the bills for the *Earth*. If I'd had my way about the matter I'd have given you that fraction of a cent more a pound. Personally, seeing that you've been supplying the paper for the *Earth* for the last thirty years without once disappointing us on deliveries, *I* think you ought to've been helped out."

"But sympathy don't pay my help. There's three hundred men up at Pulpville looking to me for bread and butter. I've had to cut their pay once—I sha'n't do it twice. They'll be out of work this Winter unless we make a new contract. I want an equitable contract at once, otherwise I'm likely to wind up on the poor-farm. What can you do for me?"

Luke Jennison looked out of the window at his elbow. He was between the devil and the deep. True, he reflected, he could act for Horatio Wagner, for he had that gentleman's power of attorney to use at his discretion whenever the owner of the *Earth* was out of town. On the other hand, he felt that should he grant the old paper-maker's demand, Wagner would be sure to disapprove. Such an action would no doubt lead to his dismissal as soon as the owner returned from Bermuda, even were he able to patch up the purple affair.

"YOU'RE in a pretty bad fix, Mr. Burleigh," Jennison went on to say. "I feel for you very keenly. I may or may not continue to hold my present position very long, but I'll exert my influence with Mr. Wagner to try to persuade him to——"

He was about to propose putting the matter off until Wagner could be reached at Bermuda, when Brennan burst into the room.

"What d'you think now?" exploded the advertising manager. "Just got two 'phones—one from Thompson-Jameson, one from Silberstein Brothers. They both want their contracts canceled until we can cut out the purple stuff. What'll I say? What can I promise?"

Instead of confusing or annoying Jennison, this latest phase of the situation simplified the Burleigh matter for him. The two firms mentioned were the heaviest advertisers in the city. The loss of their patronage would mean a falling off in receipts which would amount to about ten thousand dollars a week. Other big advertisers would no doubt follow suit. Such a

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falling off in patronage meant the certain loss of his own post. His mind working rapidly, the managing editor came to a conclusion. There was but one way to face the matter squarely; likewise one decent way to deal with the paper manufacturer.

"Tell them," he said, "tell 'em both, that we promise clean pages within a few days."

Then, turning to Burleigh, an amused expression upon his clean-cut features, Luke Jennison went on to say:

"Mr. Burleigh, the owner of this paper is now in Bermuda. In his absence I hold his power of attorney. He may, or may not, approve of what I purpose to do. At any rate, whatever I do will be binding so far as this paper is concerned. Now, I'm going to take a chance. Bring in as soon as possible whatever you consider to be an equitable contract for our paper supply. Then, when our attorneys have had a chance to go over the agreement, I'll sign it."

Tears stood in the old paper-maker's eyes. He could scarcely believe he had heard aright. He tugged nervously at his white mustache. He had been pleading, not only for himself, but for his employees, and his prayer had been granted. At last he had found a man not too busy to listen to the troubles of others.

"Mr. Jennison," he began as soon as the door closed behind the advertising manager, "you've treated me white. I'm going to do you a favor in turn. I'm going to cut out that purple business promptly on time. I intended——"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the managing editor, dumfounded at the unexpected statement.

"I mean that I'm the man that's caused you all the trouble with those purple advertisements. I mean that if you hadn't agreed to pay me a fair price for paper, that I'd have painted the *Earth* purple for some time to come. I had you in a corner. You *had* to take my paper or go without. There's not a mill in the country that could take care of you within at least sixty days. There's scarcely a pound of pulp-paper on the market that hasn't been contracted for a year ago. I came here intending to hold you up, to force you to meet my terms, or to go on with the purple ads. You got John Grunwald to agree to stop it after ten days had passed, but you didn't have my agreement to that effect. I'd have kept on indefinitely, and there's no law that could stop me. Now, you've turned out to be my friend. I'm going to——"

"*Mister* Burleigh! *Mister* Burleigh!" interrupted the astounded journalist. "Before you say more, kindly tell me what these purple letters *are*. How is it done?"

"Listen! You know as well as I do that this scheme was being worked by some one not connected with this paper."

Jennison nodded affirmatively.

"And you've also noted, I suppose, that the purple letters never show up until the papers are off the press an hour or two."

Again Jennison nodded.

"Did it ever occur to you that the purple upon the inside sheets is never so brilliant and conspicuous as the words upon the first and last pages? And that the inside pages are not exposed so much to the heat and light as are the——"

"Photography!" exclaimed the managing editor.

"No," smiled the manufacturer; "not exactly. Look here!"

From an inner pocket Burleigh produced a large piece of blank paper, closely rolled.

"This was torn off one of the blank webs up at the mill. It's the paper for tomorrow morning's *Earth*. Watch it."

Laying the paper upon the desk, Burleigh raised the window-shade behind him to admit all possible sunlight. With their eyes fixed upon the paper the two men watched and waited. They had not long to wait. Slowly at first, then faster and faster as the bright Spring sunshine got in its work, certain purple characters became apparent.

" 'EAT GRUNWALD'S OAT-MALT,' " read Jennison. "Hanged if it isn't in the paper before we print it!" he added.

"Just like a water-mark," Burleigh went on to explain. "If you'd had some of your paper examined by a first-class chemist he'd have reported finding certain chemicals in it—chemicals such as ferricyanide of potash, cobalt, albumin and carbon. I made a colorless solution out of these agents—a solution somewhat similar to that used for coating sensitized paper for photographic use. Printed invisibly upon the paper just before it's wound up into a web, it's cut off from the light and heat necessary to bring out the purple until it's unrolled and printed and out in the street."

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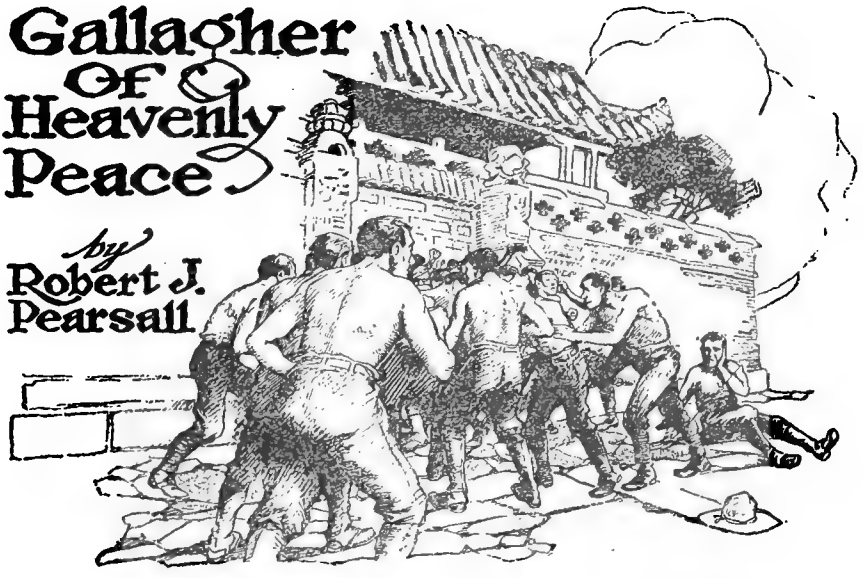
"THEN you alone were at the bottom of this conspiracy?" asked Jennison.

"Yes," was the frank reply; "that is, if you want to call it a conspiracy. It was my idea—mine alone. I made two pair of wheels fitted with rims that would take any kind of type or woodcut. They're slung on a shaft rigged between the finisher and the reeler. The rims of these wheels run through a trough filled with the solution. I can set up any kind of an ad I want, and run it through those wheels."

"But you're going to break up those wheels after three days, aren't you?" Jennison inquired anxiously.

"You can bet heavy on that!" was the old man's hearty reply as he gripped the extended hand. "You've been very white to me," he concluded.

And, three days later the owner of the *Earth* put in an unexpected appearance. After grudgingly approving the new paper contract he cut salaries all around and then left for Palm Beach, and the purple hold-up was over.



Author of "Anting-Anting," "The Reformation of Carabao."

SAY YOU so now! (indignantly interjected Sergeant Gallagher). Whist one minute. What stories you've been hearin' I know not, an' so I will answer you that wid words, an' not as I might, for while me fists last I will not be spoken of out o' me character. Listen t' me.

I did not embroil 'em. If any one did that 'twas O'Mally—but 'twas no embroilin' they needed. From the day our detachment struck Pekin an' we found ourselves sharin' bars an' bottles wid the English—an' they cocks-o'-the-walk there on account o' the other foreigners bein' easy-like—trouble was in the air. Limie an' Yank they were to each other from the start, or else mister, which was worse. A rookie would've known what was comin' from their very politefulness.

There was a month o' that, wid things growin' tenser an' tenser every day. An' whenever they showed prospects o' makin' friends, there was O'Mally—an' a rarin', tearin' fighter he was too, six feet in his socks an' a hundred an' ninety without 'em—rampagin' first on one side an' then on the other, an' stirrin' 'em up. You see O'Mally'd been an English soldier first, an' now he was an American, an', the sight o' the

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old flag havin' revived the old feelin' for it, divil a bit did he know now in his heart which he was.

As a consequence, bein' by nature a man that counted that day lost that he looked at the light of it wid two sound eyes in his head, when he was wid the English he boosted Old Glory wid his tongue an' his fist, an' when he was wid us he maintained the superiority o' the English over all. An' the English blamed the Americans for his talk, an' the Americans the English; an' by an' by 'twas "Sir" an' "Thank you kindly" entirely when they met, which was right close to the breakin' point.

THEN in Chang's one day it started right. Four English an' four Americans were there; and the English were singin' "God Save the King," bein' fair mellow wid *saujo*, an' the Americans were applaudin' courteous-like. When the English started in the fourth time, one o' the Americans, he says, "Oh, hang the King!" an' the biggest Limie answers wid, "Ah, blime it, matey, wat if I were t' saye, ' 'Ang the President' ? "

The American, bein' of opposite politics, says, "Sure, hang him, too." An' the Englishman, seein' he couldn't hurt the American's feelings wid words, tries a beer bottle, which the American countered wid a stool; an' Chang sends a coolie quick to each legation for the patrol, which arrives too late to do any good, except payin' rickshaw fare in for the eight patriots, they bein' mostly incapacitated for walkin'.

That eased matters up considerable, lettin' every man know where he was at, an' to keep one hand close to a shillalah every time he went on liberty. After that, sogerin' in Pekin was onegr and game o' dodgin' or bein' dodged, wid discipline an' duty goin' to the eternal bowwows, an' the hospital an' brig full, an' me wearin' out me finger-tips on the typewritin' machine—for me clerk had both hands busted—wid correspondence between our C. O. an' the English colonel, tryin' to scheme some way o' peace wid secrecy, for neither of 'em would report the trouble for fear o' diplomacy.

They tried restriction an' they tried punishment an' they tried appealin' to the men's common sense, an' all. But common sense the men did not have, as I could've told 'em, an' punishment made martyrs of 'em, an' restriction was like coopin' up steam in a boiler. So long the men would stand it; an' then it'd be over the wall an' on a ramblin' tear for the glory o' their flags; and first thing they knew they'd be bunched up in the corner o' some mud-walled shack, glarin' at each other. An' then the Americans would start some sort o' riot talk like this, which wouldn't no wise be justified by the facts, as well they knew. Says one American, excited-like—

"Who's down?"

"The Hinglishman's down," three or four would yell, like a mob in a play.

"Aw, give the bloomin' beggar a chawnce, cawn't ye!"

An' then in a minute—

"Who's down now?"

"The Yank's down."

"Put th' boots t' the bloody blighter."

Or the English would be springin' some o' their raw stuff; Limies are main bad for that—wid the proprietor engaged in concealin' himself an' all available property under the bar. Then hostilities would commence, wid rules o' warfare mostly in the discard, for this barroom fightin' is rough sport at the best, an' rice champagne wid beer as a chaser is a most disturbin' drink. An' worst o' all it'd be if O'Mally was present. He'd be fightin' both sides at once and alternate as likely as not; an' it mattered but little to him who he hit, for wherever his fist landed it struck both friend an' enemy.

O' course sometimes a real cause o' dispute would be wantin' to keep things at the right heat; but wid two bunches like that it would never be hard to find. Whether baseball, bein' an American sport, or soccer, bein' an English, would be admitted to the International field meet; or whether the Americans would use the rifle-range first or the English, or this, that or the other, it makin' but little difference so it gives 'em a chance to break their knuckles on the other man's head. An, when they'd fought through the whole string they could come back an' do it all over again, for the promiscuousness o' the fightin' was such that nothin' was ever settled, not even which was the best man o' two.

Crazy they were, the lot of 'em! What joy a man can get out o' strife I dunno. An' there was me, wid me fresh promotion an' first sergeant's responsibility so I could not put hand or foot in the matter without danger o' losin' me stripes. Sure, an' I could

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not even go on liberty without bein' chivvied through the streets like a jackrabbit.

It was in their own "Shamrock an' Thistle" they caught me, an' me sittin' harmless as you are, an' a-drinkin' o' their own 'alf-and-'alf—an' ten or twenty of 'em chased me through the second-story window an' down on the top o' Dutch Charley's roof, which gives way wid the weight o' me, an' I goes sprawlin' into an onfamiliar bood-woor, which scratches my face something frightful before I could get out to Hattaman Road an' the German compound, from where I was sent home under guard for fear o' further entanglements. An' when they did that thing to me, wid the first sergeant's diamond on me sleeve, then would you not have taken a hand yourself? Answer me that.

I WAS fair boilin' yet wid indignation when I accounted for the looks o' me to the colonel the next mornin'. But what sympathy did I get from him?

"The 'Shamrock an' Thistle' hasn't an overly peaceful sound," he says, lookin' at me straight. "If you were not seekin' trouble," says he, "there's many another p'ace in Pekin where you'd be less apt to find it."

"Is it then that a man wid an American uniform can not go where he likes?" I asked.

"Well," he said irritated like, "if you're bent on murderin' each other to the last man, 'tis little I can do to prevent it. I'm not blamin' you, Sergeant Gallagher; sure you're a peaceable man, an' so are they all to hear 'em tell it. Did you happen to find out in your quiet stroll what's the latest bone o' contention?"

I told him it was over the location o' the Summer camp, the English claimin' what had been the Americans, by right o' prepossession for years. You know the deserted temple some ten miles west o' Pekin, all filled wid sleepin' Buddhas an' the like, an' a beautiful place it was to rest up durin' the hot season. It's name it was that endeared it most to me, bein' a name after me own heart, which is why I don't object when some o' the fellows call me after it now.

Well, as I was sayin', every Summer the Americans had used it for a sort o' vacation, half there an half doin' runnin' guard in Pekin, turn an' turn about; but now, for want o' some other point o' difference, the English would have it; an' faith, they had some argument on their side, us havin' used it rent free for so long. But the colonel, he raved.

"Do they think they can get it by fightin' for it, the blasted Tommies?" he cries. "An' do you think you can keep it that way? Neither of you'll use it, or either of you, as meself an' Colonel McDonald decide. I could find a better excuse for fightin' than that. But what have we here?"

For of a sudden there had come a hella-balloo outside like the whole garrison had broke loose; an' when me an' the colonel went to the door we see three corporals draggin' O'Mally, who was kickin' and fightin' and swearin' obstreperous, across the parade-ground toward the officer o' the day's office. The colonel called to 'em, an' they tacked toward us, movin' wid considerable difficulty, for O'Mally had an edge on an' was full of contrary-minded impulses. But as soon as he caught sight o' the colonel, he turned quiet enough, an' I see the full extent o' the ruction he'd been in, he bein' fair covered wid blood, his shirt ripped near off o' him, an' trousers to match.

"What's the matter?" asked the colonel.

"Fightin', sir," said one o' the corporals.

"Can I not see it?" said the colonel. "What about? Where's the other man?"

"Private O'Mally would have a Union Jack at the head o' his bunk," explained the corporal. " 'Twas not another man; 'twas the whole squadroom."

"What have you to say for yourself, O'Mally?"

"I sogered wid the Quane's Own," said O'Mally, in a voice that was thick wid drink.

"Confined to guard-room," said the colonel, "seein' that there's no room in the brig," an' when he took his seat in the office again I felt plumb sorry for him, he looked so distressed.

"Never have I commanded such a detachment. Here I have just finished restrictin' them again, for the sake o' peace, an' part of 'em turn English an' go to fightin' wid the other part. O'Mally should be court-martialed," says he, "but then you should all be court-martialed, an' there's little choice between you."

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NOW that hurt me, for what had I done to be confused wid them brawlers? But says I to meself, if this goes on we will all be transferred, which would be worse than court-martialin', Pekin bein' a rare fine place to do duty in, an' Mex. money near three to one. So I speaks to the colonel, easy-like.

"It's plain," says I, "that they want it."

"Want what?" says he.

"Fightin', sir. If they did not want it they would not go after it. And, out o' all the men you have in hospital, have you one that was put there in a stand-up fight?"

"It's mostly been knock-down an' drag-out fights," he growled, "in some o' them cussed liquor-sellin' joints where me model of a first sergeant wid his dove-like temper spent last evening. But what of it?"

"Nothin'," said I, passin' over his imputations, "only there might be a way to end it."

"Is there, now?" he says, lookin' at me quick, for in spite o' his misunderstandin' of me in other ways, he knew me for a man o' discernment. "What way?"

"I'd rather not say exactly," said I boldly, for I knew he was near at his wit's end, and would pass over much. "But if you keep this restriction on, the men'll be wantin' exercise."

"Exercise!" he cries. "Exercise, is it? I'll give 'em exercise an' to spare, double-timin' around the parade-ground."

"It's onhealthy for them to be cooped up in the garrison so long," said I. "Sure a long hike wud do them good, and I would be glad of the relaxation myself," an' I looked him in the eye.

"You would, would you?" he said. "What then?"

"O' course there are some more active-like than others, as may be seen from their descriptive books. If you'd let me have fifty o' the most obstreperous of 'em, 'tis like I could cool their blood a bit without interferin' wid their military efficiency, as these barroom sports do."

"H-m," he said. "I don't know what you have in mind, Sergeant Gallagher, but take them, an' may luck be wid you. But if you get in trouble, remember," he says, "that I know nothin'."

Now it must be understood that this idea of mine, which was an inspiration, an' no less, had come upon me of a sudden. 'Twas the sight of O'Mally, ragin' like a wild man, an' ready for a fight wid any one, anywhere, on any subject, that give it to me. What's in will out, I thought; an' one man's much like another; an' powder scattered loose to the air hurts no one; and it'd be a fool of an inventor that'd design an engine without a safety-valve. An' other ideas like them, an' reflections concernin' last night, too, so me head was fair burstin' wid the bigness of it.

So that afternoon I got a pass an' went on duty to the Limie legation. I knew I'd find a supporter in First Sergeant Pierpont, who was an up-standin' man like meself, an' outrageous disgusted, as I was, wid the onpeacefulness o' the men under us. I explained my plan to him, an' he agreed an' promised to take it up, diplomatic-like as I had done, wid his commanding officer.

"The only thing," I says to him, "is that we've a two-colored renegade in our guard that's apt to be doubtful, when the time comes, which side he's on. Not that I care for that," for I would not have him think I was afraid. "It's only fair to give you odds anyway, wid our men all fresh from the States."

"O'Mally, you mean?" says he. "Sure, an' which side would he be on but ours? He's worn the king's uniform; is it likely he would forget it?"

For that I could have pasted him, had it not been for my principles; but we settled things amicable, an' I left. The next day he come to my quarters an' reported everything fixed; an' we set our watches together to the second. Then I escorted him polite-like to the gate, for the feelings o' the men, penned up as they were, were gettin' worse every hour, an' I would not have them excited wid the sight o' him.

So that day passed, an' the next, an' the next was Saturday. The colonel givin' me a free hand, I made sure that all the men I wanted were off guard an' available, an' the men like O'Mally that were in confinement I turned loose. In the hikin' detail that started out wid me that mornin' there was not one man that hadn't had his shindy wi' a Limie, nor one that had been satisfied at the finish, owin' to the inebriated style o' fightin'. Without arms, nothin' but haversacks—an' so we started.

WE MARCHED through the city slow-like, to keep 'em fresh, an' out through the west gate. Straight into the country I led 'em until we reached the hills, an' then zigzagged a bit through

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the crooked trails, wid me eye on me watch. At the right moment I straightened up the formation, give them quick time, an' headed for the temple o' contention. The men, seein' it was near noon, thought it was there I was intendin' to leave them eat; but faith. 'twas entertainment of a different character that I was providin' for 'em.

We struck the corner o' the temple an' circled around it, me wid a creepy feelin' up me back, now that the thing was so close—an' the rest happened like clock-work. Around the other corner o' the temple marched the English sergeant, at the head o' his detachment, one, two, three, four, left, right; and then both columns had stopped stock still, wid no command, and divil a sound in the air, such was the astonishment, save the words that me an' Pierpoint had rehearsed beforehand.

"Where are you goin', sergeant?" he asked.

"Into the temple," I said.

"There's not room for two of us," sez he, which was true enough, considerin'.

"Then one of us must stay out," I said, an' we each turned wid no more talk to urge our men to let the other have the right o' way.

Mother o' Heaven, but it was worse than I thought it would be! The rapscallions were growlin' down in their throats already; an' when I opened my mouth to dissuade them, I thought I would be manhandled, stripes an' all. Would they give way to a this an' that bunch o' Limejuicers? They would not. I intended to preach peace to them strong, for the sake o' the opposition I would arouse; but I see it wasn't needed.

By the time I had spoke three sentences they had pushed forward, sheddin' accouterments and shirts as they came, until they were at one side o' the gate o' the temple, an' the English at the other, wid challenges flyin' back an' forth like lightnin' between two thunder-clouds.

Seein' they were clear past reason, I asserted me authority.

"Back into ranks wid you," I ordered. "Is it likely that I, who am in charge of you, will let you go to it as long as me own two arms are free?"

An', "Is that it?" says some one wid a laugh; an' the next minute I was caught from behind, an' me wrists bound wid me own canteen strap, an' they passed me back from man to man till I was in the rear o' me party, wid the English doin' the same thing to their sergeant simultaneous.

It was a minute yet before they got together, for they were all cold sober and choosin' their men. I caught sight o' O'Mally; he was standin' a little to one side, with his big hands openin' an' closin', an' the muscles o' his jaw workin' hard under his skin. He was choosin' his nationality instead o' his man; an' I knew well what a temptation it was to him to think o' the rambunctious fights he could have wid his fellow soldiers later if he took the English part that day.

An' the rest o' the men! Oh, but it was a glorious sight, one that set me alive to the ends o' me toes, an' made me wish for once that I had not the principles I had. Fifty men against fifty, less one, which was O'Mally; all men o' build an' reach an' science; stripped to the waist, wid smooth muscles swellin' beneath their white skins, save only where it was black an' blue from past experience. In line, single file, strainin' forward; an' then one o' our men opened the game, precipitatin' himself sudden-like on the fists o' his particular Englisher. That set both lines in motion, but still there was no rush, for each was seekin' out his own, shiftin' from side to side to bring himself opposite the man wid whom he had the largest onsettled account.

THEN they met. Man, man! One instant there wasn't a sound, save for the scufflin' o' the two that were already at it; an' the next the crackin' o' fists was like the rattle of a rapid-firer. There were too many to follow individuals; but the English stood up an' fought like sober Englishmen do, an' the Americans went to 'em like Americans should; an' from left to right 'twas a fight o' gentlemen, eye to eye an' toe to toe.

Never was I as proud o' me race as I was that day. An', we bein' outnumbered, one Englishman, a strappin' big fellow he was too, stood apart like the true man he was, lookin' at O'Mally wistful-like. But O'Mally didn't seem to notice him; he stared at the strugglin' line in front o' him wid a twisted grin fixed on his face like a mask, an' his eyes troubled an' onsteady, an' his hands workin' open an' shut, faster an' faster.

For a minute, at least, it was just that, two straight lines o' strainin' legs an'

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crouchin, writhin' backs, an' near two hundred powerful fists flyin' between 'em, an' neither side givin' or takin' as much as the length o' a shoe. But o' course, that couldn't last. Pretty soon one o' our men dropped back, whirlin' around giddy-like from havin' left his guard open to his jaw, an' flopped a'most at me feet. Then an Englisher followed him out o' the game, evenin' matters up.

But them two casualties destroyed the partnership basis o' the affair, so to speak, an' the fightin' began to get promiscuous-like, each man pastin' the man opposite, an' one or two others when he got the chance. An' our left wing, which was the one furtherest from the temple an' had a bit more beef in it than the rest o' our line, began to push the English back an' curl around their end, which looked good to me till the English sergeant see his chance an' turned it against us. He had a head for strategy, that lad.

The fight was supposed to be for the possession o' the temple, you remember. The luxury o' them first few minutes o' private dispute had made most everybody forget that Pierpoint. I see him passin' slow down behind his line, whisperin' into the ear o' each man; an' I tried to figure out his scheme.

But before I could, he said the word, an' the right o' the English give way entirely an' doubled on the left.

Then, quick as parade-ground maneuvers, the men nearest the temple spread out, an' the rest jammed in on 'em, which made a solid square o' English bone an' muscle defendin' the gateway. An' my men, seein' the point o' the play, rushed into 'em ferocious, every which way at once an' from all sides, but o' course give back again like water, they havin' no formation at all.

I heard O'Mally breathin' short an quick, like a sprinter at the end o' his hundred yards. I looked at him, an' he looked at me; an' of a sudden, by my feelings an' his looks, we were neither of us in love wid our company.

I took two steps forward before I remembered meself, an' then I stopped—an' then one o' the Englishers, bein' in the center o' the square an' havin' his hands free, fished out from somewheres a two-by-twice Limie flag, an' took to wavin' it as a sign of victory.

'TWAS not despite for the Union Jack—there's but one better flag waves than that—but the thoughts o' *that* flag went to me brain like drink. I see in a flash what me men needed, an' give it to 'em, rushin' forward to reform 'em quick before the Limies could know what was comin'. But quick as I was, O'Mally brushed past me wid a wild yell o' "The Stars an' Stripes forever, byes!" peelin' his coat as he came.

"The flyin' wedge!" I yelled, so all could hear me. "Form here!" They knew me voice an' all came runnin', raisin' a cheer that warmed me heart; an' O'Mally thrust himself before me at the point o' the wedge wid a joyful laugh.

"Sure, it's fresh I am," he cried, "an' I've got mine comin' to me!" An' wid that, so quick had they closed in, we started forward.

An' I was first sergeant an' a man o' peace! But wid O'Mally in front o' me an' a man on this side an' a man on that, could I have got out of it? Could I, now? An' if I had held back, would I not have destroyed the momentum o' the charge?

"Cut me hands loose, some one, for the love o' Heaven!" I begged; but then we struck 'em, an' I went into action trussed like a fowl.

But oh me, oh my, for a moment 'twas beautiful! There was O'Mally wid his arms goin' like flails, an' the rest the same, an' three tons an' more o' weight behind us, an' us cuttin' the Britishers like butter.

I felt a stingin' jab in the eye, an' another in the mouth that fair made me reel, an' the breath was squeezed out o' me body; but, glory be, I kept me feet. I heard the Limies passin' the word one to the other, "Hold 'em, hold 'em!" But they could as well have held an avalanche. They bunched an' they struggled, an' the rearmost set their feet in the ground an' put their back to the wall o' the temple to steady the others, which, together wid the weight that was on 'em, was what brought the end as sudden an' frightsome as an earthquake.

The temple was an old one, as I've said, an' crumbly. Faith, it needn't have been so old, at that, to give way wid that pressure, bein' made mostly o' mud bricks, as them Buddha temples are.

Some one cried out ahead o' me, startled-like; there was a sudden easin' up o'

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resistance, like the English were givin' up complete; an' then we shot forward into the middle of 'em, as I had planned, but to the sound of a crash that was heard to the city wall.

I got one look over O'Mally's shoulder, an' where the front wall o' the temple had been there was no wall at all, lettin' me see clear through to the back of it. Then there was a great cloud o' dust, an' two other crashes, the side walls fallin' in too, from lack o' support.

Well, believe me, at that me heart came to me throat, an' I quit cold. Me an' O'Mally were the foremost Americans, an' we were safe; but what o' them lads we'd been fightin'? Was it not a mortal certainty that some of 'em had been forced inside the gate an' caught under the walls? An' the simultaneous catchin' o' breath behind me, turnin' into somethin' like a groan, told me that I wasn't the only one that was fearin' it.

What happened next I never exactly remembered. Fists turned into open hands, that's certain; an' we scrambled over the mess o' fallen walls, listenin' for a cry from some one beneath them, an' hearin' nothing; but so excited I was, that's all mixed up.

Then Sergeant Pierpoint got his wits, an' called to his men to line up an' count off—an' a bloody lot they were, not one without somethin' to show for the scrap, but all on their feet. For emergency's sake I got my own men in line too; an' there we stood, holdin' our breath while the English counted, an' when the last man said "fifty!" there was a bigger sigh o' relief went up from us than from them.

There was half a minute after that that we waited uncertain, eyin' each other; an' then the man standin' alongside o' me laughed, wid a cluckin' sound that I didn't understand till I looked at him an' see it was O'Mally, an' that his lower jaw was twisted to one side a bit wid a blow on the right of it; an' he says wid some difficulty, but loud—

"Begorra, an' betwixt the two av us we've spilled our beans."

An' an Englishman, Maloney by name, one o' them that had given us the most trouble, looked over at him an' up an' down our disheveled rank, an' he says:

"Is it there ye are, O'Mally? Blime me, if ye keep thrainin' in th' roight crowd long enough ye may yet be a good enough Oirishman t' be a Yank."

AN' THEN, an' then— Well, them two was the key-note speeches as they say in politics. A friendlier or more disreputable-lookin' bunch you never saw than us on our way back to Pekin. We had a bottle apiece at Schultz's to cement our regard; an' 'twas I that needed that added courage when I went to explain matters to the colonel, which I did wid one eye closed an' a head-dressin' fit for a Sikh. But I was ready for duty an' so were all my men, an' the feud was ended; an' he says at last, says he:

" 'Tis a fine pacificator you are, Sergeant Gallagher, an' a very lucky man, though you look the part o' neither. If it had not ended as it did—how would it have ended?"

"That was but incidental, sir," I said, for he was a man you could talk to straight. "They wanted a fair blow-off, an' I give it to 'em."

"That is as it may be," he answered, "but all the same, I would like," he says, "to have your luck. An' what did you say was the name o' that place?"

"Sir," I said, " 'twas the temple o' Heavenly Peace."

Wid that he grins a bit, like he sees a joke, an' after tellin' me that what damage was done the men would have to pay for, he sends me to quarters. Sure enough, next pay-day the men were docked five Mex. dollars apiece, an' me ten; for 'tis marvelous how the value o' them Chinese things increase under the hand o' the white man. But faith, a fight like that is worth ten an' double, for the sake o' the quiet—I mean that comes afterward.

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Elna Plays The Game

by George Frederic Stratton

"In Little Ole Idaho," "Dahl of Dahlhurst," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE MAGNATE AND THE TOOL

MR. C. OGDEN WHEATLEIGH, vice-president of the K. C. M. Railroad, threw his feet up on the desk, drew his cigar from his humorously curving lips and smiled.

"I suppose you've heard that one of Bret Harte's characters said, 'Life ain't th' holdin' of a good hand, but the playin' of a poor hand well.'"

Snowcraft, state senator for the Fifth District, pressed his hard, thin lips more tightly together and his small eyes half closed.

"I presume you're not insinuating that I haven't played this hand well, Mr. Wheatleigh. I've got enough of the legislators in line to pass that bill for the new northern branch, and it'll pass. That's as far as I or any man can go. Then, Governor Dahl'll veto it; and we can't begin to get the two-thirds vote to pass it again over his veto."

"I'm not criticising you, Senator. What's brother Dahl's objection to this new branch?"

"He has no objection to railroad extension, but he's fighting like a wildcat against the land grant. He says the day is past when it's necessary to give a mile of state land along each side of the tracks to get a new road—says it's robbing the state and the people. And I tell you, Mr. Wheatleigh, he's got the people back of him—all the people." Then he groaned miserably:

"It's cost the company fifty thousand dollars to pull enough men into line to pass that bill, and it'll be all wasted. We can't do anything with Dahl!"

"Forget it!" gleamed the vice-president. "The K.C.M. isn't shedding any tears over the money—they'll put in more if needed; but—" and his fist came down on his thigh with surprising force for so seemingly dainty a man—"we want that charter, and we'll get it! We'll pay Dahl fifty thousand, if that'll turn the trick!"

"Impossible!" grunted Snowcraft. "You don't begin to know him. He can make money for himself as fast as he wants it. That's where he's so strong with his friends. He's turned every acre of that Tehama Valley into wealth—put a railroad across it, and made his town the county seat. As a business man he's beyond the limit. Started it all from a little store in that old ore-bin out on the desert, and now he's got a town, with big ore smelters and three or four factories. We can't buy *him!* We couldn't do it with half a million!"

"I know him," grinned Wheatleigh. "But our engineers say there's always some one rod in a truss that gives way first. Now see here, the Lieutenant-Governor's all right, isn't he?"

"I can do anything with him," growled Snowcraft. "But he hasn't any more power

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than the doorkeeper of the Senate. It's the Governor we're up against!"

Wheatleigh leaned forward. His clean-cut face and his smiling blue eyes faced Snowcraft squarely, and that gentleman growled softly at having to consult on deep political scheming with so young and so apparently unsophisticated a conspirator. Always before, the senator's manipulations had been with men of strong wills and solemn manners, whose speech was only enlivened by biting, ironical views of their opponents. And now the twinkling eyes of the vice-president looked into his, and the good-humored lips opened smilingly as he murmured—

"But he's got the approving power, and the veto, Snowcraft!"

"Not he!" exploded the Senator. "Not unless he's the acting Governor."

"And," pursued Wheatleigh, "if for any reason—sickness or absence from the state—Governor Dahl should, unfortunately or fortunately, be unable to attend to his duties at the capital, Lieutenant-Governor Woolford would be the acting Governor, with all the powers of the Governor!"

Snowcraft started violently and glared at the vice-president, who continued in a lower tone:

"This bill is to come up on the twentieth. It'll probably be bull-dogged by the other side for a day or two; but it'll pass. You've got all that fixed?"

"Decidedly!" muttered Snowcraft. "I've got a majority all right."

"And then," continued the vice-president, "if Dahl happens to be off duty, Woolford could sign the bill at once—the same day it passes."

"What of it?"

"The plums are hanging low upon the tree," partly hummed Wheatleigh. Then he hitched his chair a little closer to Snowcraft, and for ten minutes talked in very earnest tones. As he concluded, the senator's half-closed eyes opened and his lips softened a little as he muttered:

"It might work."

"How do you stand with the sheriff of Tehama County?" asked the vice-president. "That's the Governor's county."

"Oh, he's my man! I made him, and I can handle him."

"What's the use of having power if you don't keep it working?" grinned Wheatleigh. "Make sure of the Lieutenant-Governor and that sheriff. Other details'll come easy. And how about plums? Will you want any?"

"I've got to get the right men," muttered the senator. "It'll take some one finer than a bricklayer to handle this job. About five thousand dollars won't be too much, I reckon!"

"I'll send it to you tonight," smiled Wheatleigh.

"Money!" warned the senator. "Nothing that can come back, remember!" And he left the office.

As he did so the vice-president observed gaily:

"Useful old chap, that. But he'd be still more so if he didn't pucker his corrugations so much."

CHAPTER II

ELNA STARTS FOR CHEYENNE

MRS. DAHL was perched upon the arm of the big chair in which the Governor sat, her feet swinging carelessly as she snuggled back against his broad shoulders, and her eyes glancing pathetically at the mounted head of Billy, her pet horse who had lost his life in saving the bridge and several men at the Toltec Gorge. With a slight sigh and a dull gleam of hopeless doubt in her pretty eyes, she murmured:

"Is it really so, Governor Dolly? Can't you possibly take me over to Cheyenne for Pioneer Week?"

A hungry, longing look glistened in his eyes, deeply shaded with grim determination. He shook his head slowly.

"I can't, little woman. But I'd give a year's salary to be able to go with you."

There were tears sparkling in her eyes and pleasant, appealing little wrinkles in her forehead, as she said:

"I suppose I know, but I feel all peeved up. We've never missed Cheyenne since we've been married. Think of the old cowboy stunts, Dolly! The ponies, the riding and roping and the bucking contests; and meeting the old ranchmen, and the boys and girls. Oh—h! How I love it all!"

"You'll not miss it, Elna. You'll go with your father, of course, and you'll take that new mare you buncoed me out of."

She jumped from her perch and drew herself up before him in bewitching, miniature dignity.

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"For shame, sir! To address such a phrase to the 'first lady of Idaho.'

"You're that, all right!" he gleamed. "Not because you're the Governor's wife, but because of yourself."

"Oh, how I hate all this!" she exclaimed. "This stiff, big house, and the receptions, and the dinners and all, where I have to be sober and gracious and dignified and a whole lot of stunts like that, and meander up against the cold, glassy gaze of women who've been in society in Boston and Washington."

"You meander pretty successfully," the Governor laughed. "I'm proud of you, Elna. You're a Western 'first lady' all right, and you've been more real help to me, both in business and in politics, than any other woman has been to any other husband in this old Idaho. I'm sure of that!"

"Sounds bully!" she gleamed. "But if I had you alone, and could run out to the corral with you and throw the saddle on my own dear little mare, and gallop with you across the dear old Tehama Valley, instead of cooping up in that friv'lous touring car along these stiff streets, I'd be the happy little cowgirl again. Promise me, Dolly, promise me that you'll not take a second term; that you'll be content with this, and when it ends, go back to dear old ranchland."

"I hope I can, Elna. It looks as if we were getting toward a square deal for the people who made the State; and were cutting the props from under the sharks who've been bleeding it. I swear I'd rather be back in the Tehama, but if we can't put this grafting machine on its back during my first term, I'll fight like a tiger for a second! I must! I can't leave a job half done."

"You always make me feel as you do," she flashed, "no matter how I felt before. You're going to smash this land-grabbing steal of the railroads, aren't you?"

"I'm going to put up the biggest fight I'm able to," he replied. "That's why I daren't go away—even for a day. They've passed the bill in the House by a small majority, and they'll pass it in the Senate; but—" a flash of fierce determination came into his eyes—"they'll get my veto. And they can't get enough votes to go over that, that's sure! But I've got to keep on hand. Snowcraft's handling the railroad's side of the fight and he needs watching—every moment."

Mutiny lurked in her luminous eyes as she murmured:

"Well? So I've got to go alone, eh? I'm in a frame of mind best described by dashes; but I'll go, I suppose. Poor old daddy's heart will break if I don't."

CHAPTER III

IN LOST-STREAK CAÑON

FOUR days later Elna was over in the Tehama Valley on her father's ranch. It was a busy week for the old cattleman, Bentler, selecting horses and men to uphold the credit of the Bar B in the Cheyenne contests; and Mrs. Dahl was in the saddle constantly.

"If I wasn't the Governor's wife, I'd enter for the relay races, sure!" she exclaimed to her father after a short whirlwind gallop across the plain.

The old man's eyes sparkled. He did not quite see why it would be improper for the Governor's wife; but evidently Elna saw a reason, and he judged her to be always right.

"I'll pick out the right bunch of horses for you, Elna!" he exclaimed eagerly. "If you care to meander into it."

But she shook her head.

" 'Twon't do, Daddy dear."

One morning a boy brought her a note, scrawled by the little, crippled, motherless boy, Buddy Lisby, to whom she had always been the one bright star of his short life.

I hope you can git time to come over an see me before you go to Cheyenne. I've somethin' to tell you, right now.

She had not forgotten him. A bundle of magazines were already tied up for him; and she darted into the pantry and sequestered one of her mother's rich fruit-cakes, exclaiming—

"Eminent domain, mumsie dear!"

Then she threw a saddle on her mare and cantered away along the northern trail to the Lost-Streak Cañon, up the mouth of which was the Lisby shack. She passed the great Dog-Head Rock, towering two hundred feet above the trail, and steadying the mare down to a walk she turned into the cañon.

A long, narrow vista opened among the steep, boulder-strewn mountains, showing miles of hoary summits gleaming with snow-topped caps against the August sky.

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Midway between those caps and the rough trail hung a soft purple haze, but the trail itself and the scrub oaks and sage-brush which lines it, were silhouetted in sharp distinctness against the bare gray-and-red rocks.

Suddenly, just before she reached the sharp turn around which stood the shack, a rustle broke from a clump of cottonwoods and two men rode out. They were strangers to her, dressed in the red shirts and high boots common to prospectors; but, instead of ordinary burros, they rode unusually fine range-horses. She noted that instantly, and she did not like their faces. A feeling of doubt and suspicion flashed through her mind, but the shack was just ahead—in fact it was in sight.

"Good morning, Mrs. Dahl!" exclaimed one of the men. His tone was respectful, almost courteous; and he rode up alongside of her, while his companion went just ahead.

She drew herself up and looked at him scrutinizingly.

"Good morning! Are you prospecting up here? I do not remember seeing you before."

"We're prospectin' all right. Up the cañon here a dozen miles, an' we don't get down into Dahlhurst much, 'ceptin' for supplies. Ride ahead, Bull! You know what to do."

The other man kicked a spur in brutally, and his horse plunged into a canter. In a few moments he reached the shack, dismounted and opening the door, went in. At the same moment the younger man laid his hand on Elna's rein.

"We'll stop here a moment while I tell you what's ahead, Mrs. Dahl. You ain't goin' to stop at Lisby's. There's a girl up the cañon, at our camp, that sure wants ter see you; an' you'll come up there first!"

She touched a spur to the mare's side but the man's grasp was of steel.

"Let go of that rein!" she ordered. "I am going to stop here at Lisby's!"

Her mare was plunging violently, but the man was a superb horseman and he controlled her.

"Steady a moment. You'll go up there! Lisby ain't at home. He's gone over to Stonycreek. We made sure of that! An' Bull's keepin' that boy back from the window so as he won't see you pass. You're riskin' your mare, Mrs. Dahl. If she breaks away I'll put a bullet in her. I won't hurt you, but I'll finish her, an' then you'll have to ride double!"

She saw her helplessness in a moment, and she calmed the horse.

"This is a hold-up, I suppose. Take what you're after and ride on."

"It's no hold-up, lady," he laughed. "It's just a little visit to a girl up in the mountains. It's your husband we're after—not you. An' we're figurin' that he'll come after you, all right."

"Yes, he'll come!" she retorted with intense scorn. "And when he comes he'll have men with him—real men!"

He grinned and led her mare along. As they drew close to Lisby's he warned:

"Any screamin' won't do no good. Bull's got the kid covered, an' he won't know who's screamin', anyhow."

"When I scream it will be to some purpose!" she exclaimed.

They rode on up the trail, and in five minutes Bull cantered up to them, passed them and rode just ahead. Her keen, searching glance at him gave her no clue to his character. He was heavily and powerfully built, and his bearing was that of a soldier.

As the trail narrowed the younger man dropped behind, and so she rode on between the two.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHASE

GOVERNOR DAHL gasped as he read the telegram from his father-in-law, Con Bentler:

> Elna kidnaped by hold ups. Taken up the Lost-Streak Cañon. Will start with Sheriff's posse right off. BENTLER.

"Kidnaped!" he exclaimed. "Taken north into the wildest country of the state!" He turned suddenly to his secretary.

"Collingwood! Get Senator Burshall on the 'phone. Ask him to come here instantly. Very urgent business. Don't let anything stand in the way!"

Five minutes later the secretary announced—

"The senator says, sir, that he will come over at once."

The Governor was studying the state map.

"Call up the garage, Collingwood. Order out a car at once. Then ride down to the

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station and engage a special engine and coach to run up to Washakie. I want it in an hour, if possible. Find out the time they can start and the exact time they'll run through Dahlhurst. And, Collingwood! Tell them to hook on a car for horses. When you've got the train time settled, wire to Kroth at Dahlhurst; make it J. Kroth or W. P. Reddale. Tell either of them to have six good men with horses ready to meet the special and to have my horse, Stinger, with them. That's all! You see the need for rush, Collingwood!"

"Shall I get ready to go with you?"

"No, you must camp right here, day and night, Collingwood. I must have some one I can absolutely depend upon to communicate with, direct."

As the secretary left, Senator Burshall strode in and the Governor handed him the telegram. The senator's face showed his sympathy and indignation, but he wasted no time on words.

"I'm going after her, Burshall," exclaimed the Governor. "Bentler and a sheriff's posse are following those fellows' trail; but I'll go ahead of them and work back along the Bitter Root Range. It's wicked country, up there, but we'll have them between us."

"How can I help you, my dear Governor?"

"Right here! That railroad bill is to come up on the twentieth in the Senate, and I can only depend on you and our friends to fight it. I know the majority's against us, and that it'll probably pass and then come to me for approval—which it won't get. Delay it at every point. I must go."

An hour later he was behind one of the most powerful mountain engines of that western country. Northeast, across miles of open, then along the foothills of the great Tehama Mountains and through Thunder Cañon they dashed at record speed. They pulled into Dahlhurst six hours after the start. The Governor saw with a throb of pride the party of bronzed men on horses.

Almost before the train stopped the small loading platform was rushed up against the box car and the loading of the horses commenced. Kroth—"Bobcat" Kroth—the leader, sprang to meet the Governor with a telegram.

"This is from Con Bentler, Governor. He sent it from the Toltec Mine—up the East Fork."

"The East Fork? I thought they'd taken the Lost Streak Cañon!" He read the message:

> Gone up East Fork. Sheriff had pointer they'd gone through there. BENTLER.

"That'll take them over into the Rockies, I reckon," growled Bobcat.

"I thought they'd work up the Bitter Root Range," muttered the Governor.

"Now we'll keep on north to Washakie. Those bandits may strike into the woods between the ranges, and we'll head them off there."

On again, north across the Tehama Valley, striking along the Bitter Root foot-hills where abrupt curves, wicked grades and indifferent tracks made progress exasperatingly slow, so that they did not arrive at Washakie until the first pink rays of a rising sun were tipping the surrounding peaks.

For two days they beat back and forth, detouring to call at the few widely scattered sawmills, in the hope of some trace of the men they were after, or of finding wires over which to communicate back to Dahlhurst. But there was neither railroad nor wires through that section.

Just at the close of the second day they came to a portable sawmill and there learned from one man, who had just come through the woods from Canada, that he had passed, on the trail, a man and woman on horseback. It was Elna! His description of her dress was exact, although he was somewhat hazy in describing features.

"They had packs," he related, "an' the fellow asked me how fur it was to Kanosh—that's just on the line."

"How far is that?" asked the Governor.

"Thirty miles from here. They're over there now, I reckon. I passed them last night."

On again, both men and horses so worn that ten miles from the mill they had to camp for the night. Then, before the heavy, somber pines had caught one hint of daylight, they had broken camp and started northward.

The trail was more open than any they had used and they came to clearings with settlers' shacks. Twice again the Governor heard of his wife, and his heart lightened somewhat as one man told him that she was

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riding well and did not seem to be in any trouble.

"Didn't appeal to you for any help?" demanded the Governor.

"No. She didn't have nothin' to say; neither did the man with her. He's a rough lookin' ole devil, an' she seemed 's if she was afeered of him, some. I thought he was a new settler, lookin' fer land; an' them fellers often git pretty tired out an' ugly."

AT KANOSH, on the border, they found a ford across the river, a store and a dozen houses. They heard that the man and woman had passed through the day before, and after buying some food at a lonely outlying house, had ridden along. But there was a solitary Canadian customs officer there, and he refused to allow Dahl's party to enter without paying duty on the horses. In vain the Governor told who he was—that he had rushed into the search with but a small amount of cash with him. The officer was stubborn. He was working under Government orders and discipline, and could not admit them. A bank draft he laughed at.

"I can manage to pay duty on two horses," exploded the Governor at last. "Kroth, you'll come with me." Then turning to the party, he said:

"Boys! I'm sorry, but you'll have to camp here. There is no telegraph line here; but we shall strike Baysville, forty miles in, and there I can get funds at the bank or wire to Boise."

"We'll wait for no funds!" exploded Socorro Sam. "There ain't no one customs officer, nor a dozen, kin hold us up—not excessive!"

A yell that echoed back from every building in the village followed this declaration. But the Governor wheeled.

"Don't be rash, boys! I understand how you feel, exactly, but consider what we're after. We can get in touch with the Canadian Mounted Police very quickly, I believe?"

"There's two of them due here tonight on regular patrol," asserted the officer.

"And they, boys, are the fellows to help us," said the Governor. "They know every rod of this country; we do not. We must be friends with them."

There was no glimmer of any agreeing response to this appeal, until a wink—unseen by the Governor—closed for a moment one of Kroth's eyes. Then Socorro wheeled his horse, and facing the men, repeated the wink, and growled:

"It'll have ter be as the Governor says. We'll go an' make camp."

The Governor paid the duty on the two horses, and he and Kroth rode on. At the edge of the village clearing there stepped from the shelter of a small orchard a man, dressed in what appeared to be a cross-country auto costume. As he came close to them, he stared and then tossing his cap to the ground, exclaimed:

"Great Scott! It's Dahl! Good old Phil Dahl!"

"Jim Oakley! What are you doing here?"

"Same to you, Phil. But here, I forgot that you're Governor, and I've been hollering at you just plain old Phil."

"Forget it!" gleamed Dahl.

He sprang from his horse and the two men grasped hands. Then, in a few words he told Oakley what brought him north. A gleam of deep sympathy lit up the man's eyes.

"Perhaps I can help you, Phil. You always went out of your way to help me when we were in old Denver together. Now, look here! I've got an aeroplane up here. She lies in the pasture beyond that orchard.

"You, on horseback, can see only a few rods ahead or behind—there's no side views in these woods; but I, overhead, can see a mile—sometimes ten miles of trail, and I can cover more ground, or space, in an hour than you can in twenty-four. Let me help you!"

"We need help, all right!"

"My machine is very reliable," urged Oakley. "I've tested it for weeks. And there's a seat for one passenger. What do you say?"

"I'll do it!" exclaimed the Governor. "Kroth! Ride on to Baysville and lead my horse. I may need him there. Wait there 'till you see or hear from me."

"You goin' up in one of them flyin' machines?" cried Kroth. "Over these forests! Don't do it, Governor."

But Dahl was striding through the orchard with his friend, and in a few minutes Kroth gasped as he saw the aeroplane soaring into the air and gliding above the tops of the big trees. Soon it dissappeared over the first range.

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CHAPTER V

ELNA MEETS THE GIRL

UP, ALWAYS up, along the weird, gloomy cañon rode Elna and her captors. Steyne—once only had Bull addressed him by that name—had intimated at first that the camp was a dozen miles away; but they rode for twenty, and then, after a halt for a lunch of tomatoes and frijoles, rode on again. Once she demanded of Steyne how much farther they had to go, and he replied:

"To the divide, lady. It's less than ten miles, now."

She could not repress a shudder as she thought of the distance they were putting between themselves and civilization. She had only once before been up the Lost-Streak Cañon, but she knew that it was the most isolated of all along the range. It led, beyond the divide, into the dreariest, loneliest country of Northern Idaho. Beyond the northern slopes of the range, only a small valley intervened before they would strike into the still more lonely Bitter Root Mountains.

Miserably, almost frantically, troubled at her apprehensions—sometimes of the worst—she rode on, up between the stupendous cañon walls. Night was coming on. Only the peaks rearing into the sky on either hand and far ahead, showed touches of light.

Suddenly, at a sharp turn around an enormous boulder, a gleam of fire shot up from a small bench a few rods ahead, and its welcome light put a glow of comfort into her as she saw, standing upon a huge rock and silhouetted against the sky, a girl.

As the ring and rattle of the stones under their horses' hoofs changed to a dull, soft thud on the grass which covered the bench, Steyne's voice rang out with heartiness:

"Hello, Graby! We're here!"

A man came out of the gloom, grizzled and stern; but Elna shifted her sharp, quick glance from him to the girl—woman rather, for she was probably twenty-six or -eight. She stood, hands on hips, gazing at her visitor, and Elna's quick estimate was that she was not of the mountains or the ranches.

Her complexion was fair, almost sallow—not the rugged, healthy tan of a mountain-bred girl—and her dress was of city cut and city material.

Elna dropped from her horse; the forty-mile ride had been very wearisome, even to her.

"Take her into the camp, Sadie!" commanded Steyne. "If she ain't tuckered out she ought to be."

They went into the shack, which was partly lit by the glow of the camp-fire.

"I'll get a lantern," murmured the girl, "and a pail of water. Maybe you'd like a wash, although our toilet-room is pretty bum—for you."

As she returned, Elna stepped toward her.

"Who are you? And tell me why I've been brought up here?"

"I'm the daughter of the old man, out there, Hank Graby," replied the girl. "Maybe I'll put you wise presently why you're here; an' maybe I won't. 'Pends upon the way I feel. Well, I've got ter sling the hash."

After supper Elna went back to the shack and threw herself on the pile of cedar brush which was the only indication of a bed.

"These men must be little accustomed to cowboys," she thought. "They don't know my father and his outfit, or they'd not be sitting here right on the trail with a big give-away fire lighting up the whole cañon."

The opening of the shack faced down the cañon, and she kept her eyes fixed on the dark, gloomy gash, hoping and expecting every moment to catch the first glimpse of pursuing horses, or hear the first click of their hoofs.

Presently the girl sauntered in, and sat on a box.

"Feeling pretty good?" she inquired.

"I'd feel better if I knew what all this means," responded Elna. "Do we stay here all night?"

"Sure. And it'll be a bunch of nights before you see the glad rags of your cowboy friends again, or I miss my guess."

"I guess you miss it, all right," laughed Elna with a touch of sarcasm. "You don't know my friends."

"There's bubbles in your dream-box!" retorted the girl. "Now, I don't care if I put you next. You won't see no friends up here for a good while, 'ceptin what are here now. They're lookin' fer you up the East Fork!"

"The East Fork!" gasped Elna. Then she laughed again. "You don't know what ranchmen are on trails."

"I know what sheriffs are," muttered the

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girl. "An' I'm wise that they're crooked—some of 'em. That one of Dahlhurst is all right, all right! He's rubbed the dope into that bunch that's with him, that he's had a pointer that you'd been slipped through across-cañon into the East Fork; an' they're doin' the turkey trot over into the Bitter Root Mountains."

Almost a groan broke from Elna. The girl laughed and continued:

"All the same it's up to you. I ain't got no love fer Steyne. He's a big boob, an' I'd just as soon put a dent in his intellect, if you want to get busy."

"Me! How?"

The girl pulled her box over to the brush and went on:

"If you ain't afraid to take to the trail alone, you can git out, all right. Listen! We'll change rags, an' presently when they're batting their eyes, you kin slip out. Then you'll have ter get away the best you can. You'll have all night of it. They won't miss you 'till morning."

"You'll do this? You!" exclaimed Elna.

"Surest thing you know!"

"But my mare! How can I get her?"

"You can't. The horses are tied in plain sight. You'll have to leg it. But I tell you, right over the divide, about ten miles, there's a sheep outfit, an' one of the men's got a wife. You can reach them, all right, an' Steyne an' Bull ain't goin' ter put up any rough-house with them. Git busy!"

She took the blanket from the brush bed and hung it across the shack opening, laughing:

"That's the dope! They'll think we're doin' the disrobin' act for our little by-bys."

"But you!" murmured Elna. "You'll get into trouble over it, I'm sure."

"Ferget it! I'll have the merry ha-ha on Steyne, an' he's the guy I'm layin' fer. My old dad'll look out fer me. Git busy!"

They changed clothes in the dim light which filtered through the cracks in the log walls, and while fumbling among the brush bed to pick up some article, Elna's hand touched a revolver. With a gasp of delight her fingers closed over it, and wheeling her back to the girl she slipped the gun into the loose blouse she had just put on.

Then she slipped her little pocketbook into the girl's hand.

"There's only a dozen dollars, or so, there," she murmured. "I wish it was twenty times as much. Perhaps—I sure hope—that I can get a chance to do more for you."

"I don't pull down much coin," muttered the girl. "There! Don't reel off any more gush. Here's where we ring up on a new act. Watch now!"

She glided to the opening and pushing past the blanket strode to the fireside and with a cackling laugh exclaimed:

"Good evening, gents! The scheme worked. Now to put it over on the Governor."

A roar of laughter greeted her. Elna sank back from the opening and buried her head in her hands, while bitter sobs of rage and despair broke from her. She heard the men moving and horses tramping, and after a few moments she again peered from the opening. Old Graby was cinching a bulky pack behind his saddle, and the girl was mounted. There were a few words of low consultation with Steyne and then the girl turned toward the shack, waving her hand:

"Farewell, my understudy. Sorry I can't stay longer, but I've got a date with your hubby, way up north here. So long!"

Then with another chuckling laugh she and her father rode up the trail to the divide, leaving Elna again alone with the two men.

CHAPTER VI

IT IS NOT ELNA!

THE first five minutes of Governor Dahl's trip in the airship was both the longest and the shortest by far that he had ever experienced. As the roaring buzz of the motors was followed by the sharp upward tilt of the airship, every thought of his wife's danger and of his own risk was blotted out by the dropping of the earth beneath them; the plunge through the loose waving tops of the big pines and the quick rise to an altitude where the view stretched for scores of miles over a rolling mass of heavy foliage.

He started violently at Oakley's voice.

"I'm running slow now, Phil. It'll give us a chance to watch the trail and the openings."

Dahl glanced at the indicator and ejaculated—

"Slow!"

The finger pointed to fifty-seven. But Oakley only grinned.

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Beneath them lay the trail, a thin black line, wavering between the dense growth of pines. Oakley followed the line, slowing down to forty-two. They watched for men or horses or crossroads, but saw nothing until they passed over a log shack in the middle of a ten-acre clearing, in which stood a lone woman, gazing up at them.

They rose higher, and in the near distance caught sight of roofs and a sheet of water.

"Baysville!" informed Oakley. "We'll run down I suppose, for inquiries."

Dahl nodded; and in a few moments, gracefully and gently, in wide circles, the airship settled lower and lower until she fluttered on to a pasture, landing with a gently resilient bound, plunging again slightly upward, and then coming to rest.

They were at the edge of the small town, and ten minutes' walk took them to its center. In another ten minutes they had heard of Elna and her captor. It was the settler from the small clearing they had passed who informed them:

"They took the old lumber-trail, east of my place. That leads over to Beaver Lake where they used to do some loggin'; but they aren't doin' none, now."

"Can they get out of there on any other trail?" asked Dahl.

"Sure! That road leads in for three or four miles and strikes out on to the Rossiter Road. That runs into Calgary."

The Governor wired to Dahlhurst:

Tell Bentler I'm hot on the trail—here in Canada.

In an hour he received a reply:

Bentler still up East Fork. Haven't heard from him since they left.

Again in the aeroplane, across and back in continual zigzags, they flew over every opening, watching every indication of a cross-trail, every sheet of water. Twice they descended at little settlements and made inquiries, without success.

At last, as the shadows were lengthening and darkening so that objects beneath the great trees were growing indistinguishable, they darted across a small lake, and on the edge was a tiny tent. Close by two horses were tied.

"I'll have to hunt for a place to land," groaned Oakley. "It seems to be all forest, and the machine would never reach ground here."

He curved around in circles, small at first but gradually widening. Then they saw an opening.

"An old beaver meadow, I guess," grunted the aeronaut.

They landed on the rank grass and found footing. Half an hour afterward they approached the tent and peered from the shelter of some heavy low cedars. With a gasp of joy Dahl saw his wife, walking along the bank. His eyes gleamed pathetically as he noted the trim khaki dress, the high boots and the jaunty sombrero distinctly outlined against the open lake. An old man was touching a lighted match to a bunch of sticks.

Dahl strode out, his .44 leveled as he shouted—

"Hands up, you!"

The hands went up, and Dahl commanded:

"Take his gun, Oakley, if he's got one." Then Dahl turned to the woman and saw, for the first time distinctly, her features. It was not his Elna!

With a bitter groan of surprise, despair and fierce raging alarm he stepped close to her, grasping her arm, and demanded:

"Who are you? Where did you get that dress—that hat? Where is my wife?"

She did not wince or draw back. Instead, she chuckled softly:

"Hah-ah! Enter the Governor of Idaho. Dad! Come and be introduced. This is my father, Mr. Hank Graby."

"Answer my questions!" hoarsely demanded the Governor. "That hat, and dress—how did you come by them?"

"Keep cool, Governor! Your little wife's all right. I exchanged clothes with her, so that she could escape from those fellows."

"Escape! You helped her—you changed clothes with her! For God's sake, woman! Tell me the truth!"

"Don't know anything else," she retorted. Then, in quick, crisp slang she told him of meeting with his wife; of the exchange of clothes; cross-tracking from the truth by stating that Elna had escaped that same night, and that her own father and herself had cut loose from the pair of skates who would do such outrage on a poor little lady as to kidnap her.

"Where did she go?" demanded Dahl.

"She struck northeast, over the divide. That would take her into Montana, an' she's workin' through there." A curious

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twinkle of triumph came into her eyes as she added:

"You'd better get after her, real sudden, Governor. O'course there's some sheep outfits through there, Dad says, but she's alone, you see!"

The Governor dropped on to a fallen log and put his chin on his hands, while he glared long and searchingly at Graby, who sat, sullen and voiceless, against a tree. He did not like the appearance of the man and the woman, and suspicion conflicted with his hopes. The woman's story gave him little comfort.

"I hope you are telling me the truth," he muttered finally. "Let me know your address, and if it is as you say, I'll send you a reward which I'm sure you'll say is ample."

"Forget it, Governor!" she laughed. "Virtue is its own reward, accordin' to the old spiel. You git on your white wings again an' chase yourself over into Montana. You'll find your little wifey, all right, all right, if she hasn't gone home before this."

For a few moments Dahl sat, and thought. Then he sprang to his feet.

"Come on, Oakley!"

"You'd better get the Mounted Police to watch that couple!" muttered Oakley as they plunged through the brush. "I can't say that I feel any great confidence in that story."

"Nor I," moaned the Governor. "I'll have them watched. I'll have them arrested, to prove how that woman came by those clothes." Then to himself, in choking gasps—

"Is it murder, or—worse?"

As they reached the machine he asked:

"About where are we, Oakley? Any idea where the nearest town is?"

"Calgary! I reckon it to be about fifty miles northwest of here. We ought to see the lights if we sail high enough; and I guess we'd better make for it. You'll find authorities there. It's a Mounted Police station and good telegraph connections. We can make it in less than an hour."

"Yes! That's the best thing—the only thing to do now!" groaned the Governor.

CHAPTER VII

CHASING THE CHASERS

AFTER Graby and his daughter had ridden away from the prospector's camp, Elna flung herself upon the brush in the shack and for a little while gave way to despair. Now, again, she was alone with the two men; and night, the time of tragedy and foulness and dishonor, was on them. She kept her fingers closed lovingly around the revolver, crawling over to one of the broad chinks between the logs, where light enough came in for her to look at the chambers and rejoice in seeing that they were all loaded.

Then she pondered over it all, forgetting her own peril in the puzzle before her.

"What does it all mean?" she muttered. "Was that girl lying again when she said that Sheriff Berkhole was crooked; that he had taken my father and the boys over into the East Fork on a false scent! Perhaps *that* is true. Something has gone wrong, or they would have been here before this—long before! And where is Dolly? My dear old Dolly! Why——"

Then she gasped, and muttered again:

"That's what Steyne said down by Lisby's. 'It's your husband we're after, not you!' Where is he now!"

She dabbed her eyes furtively with a crumpled handkerchief and a rebellious scowl darkened her face. She sat motionless, but presently the curve of her lips rounded into a whistle and the forehead gradually puckered into wrinkles. Then she sat up, gleaming.

"P-r-e-t-t-y s-m-o-o-t-h w-o-r-k! It's pay-dirt, all right. That's why they're wanting Dolly—good ole Governor 'Watch Me' Dolly! I've got all the pieces now, I guess. It's that railroad bill that's the nigger in the fence. Why didn't I think of that before?

"Dolly said: 'They'll get my veto, and they can't get enough votes to go over that!' And now, they've put up this job—that grafting scoundrel Snowcraft's at the bottom of it—to put the Governor where he can't veto it. The twentieth! That's—let me see. That's tomorrow! They're getting him out of the state—perhaps he's out now! Perhaps he's with father, up the East Fork, and over in Montana on that false scent."

Then for an instant a little cloud of doubt swept over her.

"That girl! That lying girl said she was going north to see my hubby! Eh? I've got the answer to that. I sure have! Dolly's wise. He let Father start from below with one bunch of boys, and he has dashed north, somehow, to head off Mr.

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Steyne. And that girl has gone up there to impersonate me, and draw him deeper into Montana, or—or perhaps into Canada."

She peeked from the opening. The fire was only a bed of glowing ashes now, but she could see the men. Bull was sprawling on some brush, asleep; and Steyne, alert and watchful, was sitting, his back against a tree and always smoking cigarettes.

Presently, worn out by fatigue, both of mind and body, she dropped asleep, hugging the revolver to her breast.

SHE awoke early, aroused by some movements and voices about the camp. Springing up she peered from behind the blanket at the opening and saw Steyne busy at the fire on which a coffee-pot was heating. Bull was throwing a saddle on to his horse. After a hastily bolted breakfast he mounted and rode down the cañon, Elna catching the last words with which Steyne warned him:

"Six miles down, Bull; at that sharp turn 'round Bald Head Mountain. You can see down the trail for three miles from there; an' if any one shows up, you can git back here, three miles ahead of 'em. Savvy?"

So they were guarding against pursuers! Presently Elna sauntered out, receiving a "Good morning" from Steyne, and a laughing remark that business had caused him and Bull to eat breakfast without her. She glanced at her mare and Steyne's horse, whose locations had been changed since the previous evening, giving them fresh grazing; and she saw a stream of water gurgling down the cañon bed.

"I suppose I may go over there and wash?" she remarked.

"Sure thing! Go anywhere except around the horses. I daren't trust you there. You're too quick a rider for that!"

She strode over and bathed her face and neck, partly drying herself with her handkerchief, for of towels there were none. After a breakfast of well-cooked mountain trout, which she ate with real enjoyment, Steyne went over to the stream, fastened hook and line to a short pole and fished, while she sat and watched him, and thought.

"If he had been rougher, or rude," she almost moaned, as her hands crept toward her blouse, "I could do it, without one spark of hesitation; but——"

Then her thoughts went back to her husband. What peril was he in? Were there not other members of this gang planning to kidnap *him?* If so, there would be a fight, she knew; and who would get hurt?

And that bill—that thieving land-grab bill! That would go through and be signed by the Lieutenant-Governor. These thoughts steeled her into fierce determination to protect her husband and her loved Idaho—herself she lost sight of.

She sauntered a little closer to Steyne with assumed interest in his sport, really watching her chance.

It came soon. He hooked a trout, and was instantly on his feet, playing it skilfully. Yes, it was her chance; for his eyes, and all his alertness, were centered on the fish. And as he swung around so that his back was partly turned, she—praying for the sureness of her aim—fired at his thigh.

WITH a muffled yell he dropped, rolling over instantly on his side, and his right hand fumbling for his holster; but in two bounds she had gained a position where he would have to shoot over his head to reach her; and in sharp ringing tones she commanded:

"Don't draw it, Steyne! You're a dead man if you do. I've got you covered!"

His hand came away from his hip. Again she commanded:

"Now, draw that gun! Keep the muzzle toward your feet and then toss it aside. Slow and steady, Steyne! Very steady, or it will be your last movement on this earth!"

He obeyed her. She sauntered over to the revolver and picked it up with a thrill of joy. It was a heavy, fine .44; whereas the gun she had found in the bed was a little .32—not a very reliable weapon for real work. She tossed the small gun into the stream, put the other into her blouse, and then looked at Steyne, who was supporting himself on one elbow.

"Hurt much?" she inquired. He felt the tone of earnest solicitude.

"Didn't hit the bone, I reckon," he grunted. "Caught the tendons, I guess."

"I had to do it!" she replied. "I had to take the first chance to free myself from you."

"Didn't know you had a gun!" he stammered again.

She saw a stream of blood oozing around his ankle, and she dashed into the tent, searching eagerly for some scraps of linen.

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with which to bandage it. But she found nothing. Nothing except the coarse, rough blanket which still hung at the opening.

She glided to the dark corner; slipped off a petticoat, tore it into wide strips and darting out again, tossed the bundle within his reach, exclaiming:

"You'll have to bandage it yourself. I daren't come within your reach—if you are hit."

"I'll manage it, all right," he groaned.

She dashed over to the horses, cleared away her mare, threw on saddle and bridle and went back to the shack. Steyne, although undoubtedly suffering, could not repress a gleam of admiration at her evident experience and skill. She tore down the blanket, tossed into it a liberal package of crackers and a couple of cans of tomatoes and a box of matches. She rolled all up deftly and with surprising speed into a regulation pack, strapping it behind her saddle.

"When do you expect Bull back?" she asked.

"Not much before night," he muttered. "He's watching down there."

She collected a couple of armsful of the brush which lay around the camp, and tossed it within his reach. She also set a pail of fresh water there, and a box of crackers.

"You'll have to stand it till Bull comes," she said. "I'm going!"

He fumbled at his cartridge-belt, unbuckled it and tossed it, with a wince of pain, toward her.

"May as well take that, as you've got the gun. Ther's no knowin' what you're goin' up against. An', look here! You've made a getaway; I'll give you a pointer if you care to take it. You dursn't go down the cañon. You'd run up against Bull! You'll have to go over the divide an' hike thirty miles at least to reach help. That's at Washakie. There's no sheep-ranch between. Sadie lied about that!"

"I suppose, likely, you're lying too; but I'll go over the divide. I'm not going down to meet Bull. I hope you'll pull through, all right; and I expect to see you next time in jail—or at least, in court." And springing into the saddle she took the trail up to the divide.

She reached Washakie as the western sun was streaming into the windows, and in ten minutes the mayor's house, to which she had been conducted, was surrounded by sympathetic townspeople, for the news of the kidnaping of the Governor's lady had stirred them.

"I'll have to depend on you, Mr. Pendleton," she laughed to the grizzly old mayor. "I'm without a dollar; but I must find the Governor. I must use the telegraph first—in every direction; and then, perhaps, go in search of him. There's more back of all this than just my kidnaping."

"The city is yours, my dear lady!"smiled the old mayor. "We've heard something about the Governor. He found a friend with an airship, at Kanosh, on the border; and he went up in that—north—to look for you. He had sure information that you'd gone up there."

"In an airship!" she gasped. "My husband—up over those wilds in an airship—looking for me? Did he have no men with him?" pleaded Elna. "He didn't come up here alone?"

"He brought six cowboys with horses with him on his special train. They rode with him as far as Kanosh an' then he left them. Then, they pushed over the border an' up to Baysville, an' there—" he hesitated a moment and then stammered—"there, they got arrested—for smugglin'!"

"For smuggling?"

"Smugglin' their hosses! The customs officer would not admit the hosses without duty or a bond. The Governor had to leave 'em there 'til he'd reach some real town. An' they wouldn't wait! As soon as he got out of sight, they rushed the officer an' followed up the Rossiter trail to Baysville, where they run against the Mounted Police. That's where they are now—in jail!"

For a moment Elna gazed blankly at the Mayor, absorbing the story. Then she burst into an uncontrollable rippling peal of laughter.

"Oh-h, dear! That's rich on the boys. It sure is! Well" she decided, "that's another reason for finding the Governor quick. He'll take care of the boys."

She rushed to the telegraph office, and under the advice of the mayor, wired to authorities at Baysville, Calgary and another town further to the northwest. She also sent to Dahlhurst.

An hour later, while enjoying a supper with Mr. Pendleton's family, she received two answers. One from Baysville said:

Governor Dahl left in airship this morning, sailing northeast. Heard you had been seen up there.

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"That's the girl who is impersonating me," snapped Elna in disgust.

The other telegram was from Dahlhurst.

Telegram from Bentler received yesterday. Has cut loose from Sheriff Berkhole and gone west into the Bitter Roots.

"Those hold-ups sure have played their game well," she said gloomily. They're leading my hubby and father into it, deeper and deeper; and I—I am here safe with you, but unable to let them know."

"The Governor will surely call very soon at one of those towns, and then he'll hear of you," comforted the mayor.

"I daren't depend on that! I must get help, Mr. Pendleton, and then go up there and put others to work. There's not a moment to be lost! Today is—" she almost wailed in her growing despair—"is the twentieth. You are a friend of my husband, sir! You belong to his party. You must feel as he does about that railroad land-grab steal?"

"I sure do!" glared the mayor fiercely. "Every man 'round here feels that way."

"That bill comes up in the Senate today—the twentieth! It will pass—perhaps today—perhaps not for a day or two; and if the Governor is not back to veto it, the railroad company will get their charter!"

"What can we do?" the mayor growled. "What can I do?"

"We must push on, at once!" she urged with decision. "We must get over to Baysville, release those boys and rouse the whole country to search for the Governor. Will you go?"

The question was a command.

"Will I!" He turned to his son. "Jeff! Help Ben hitch up those sorrels to the light wagon. Mother! Pack a basket of good food."

In a short time they drove along the dark toward the border.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TWENTIETH

GOVERNOR Dahl found himself fully expected at Calgary. His wife's telegram to the mayor was handed to him as he stepped from the airship. It read:

Governor Dahl of Idaho over your country in airship. If he comes tell him I am safe in Washakie. Tell him get back into Idaho instantly. All a plot to get him out of state. Remember the twentieth.

ELNA DAHL.

He dropped the paper and pressed his hand to his forehead, his face aflame. Oakley gazed at him in surprise and with a sharp thrill of fear:

"What is it, Dahl? Nothing wrong—nothing wrong with your—your wife?"

The Governor pointed to the paper.

"Read that!"

Oakley did so. He knew nothing of the Governor's political fights at Boise, but he saw big things must be involved in this plot.

"Eighty miles to the border, Dahl!" he said cheerily. "We can start again as soon as I've filled the tanks."

Dahl grasped his hand and wrung it fiercely.

"You're a friend, all right! This telegram was sent yesterday; today is the twentieth, and—" glaring at his watch— "I'm probably too late now, unless they're forcing it into a night session."

"Clear up anything you have to do here," exclaimed Oakley, "while I'm getting the tanks filled."

Dahl nodded and turned to the mayor, who said heartily:

"I congratulate you on the good news. This is Captain O'Malley, of the Mounted Police."

They greeted each other cordially.

"I regret, Mr. Governor, that your men were detained at Baysville," said the captain.

"My men detained at Baysville!" exclaimed the Governor. "Why I left them at Kanosh——"

"I know cowboys," the captain laughed. "And so do you. Borders are nothing to them when their leader goes ahead. They crossed, and were placed under arrest at Baysville; but I've telegraphed orders for their release, at once."

"Arrested?"

"For smuggling!" grinned the captain.

Dahl dashed off another telegram to Kroth.

Take boys back to Washakie. Wife safe there. I'm coming.

Then grasping the hands of the mayor and the captain, he smiled:

"Here's my aeronaut friend. Some day I'll be back and seal this acquaintance."

It was a black night, with a gusty wind tumbling the clouds into weird configurations. Oakley was seeking altitude. At every great circle they rose higher and

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higher. Then he straightened out for a fair line to the south. The speed indicator showed eighty-two miles an hour.

They had run above the low surging mass of clouds, and the air had chilled sharply.

"Running into a storm, I'm afraid," grunted Oakley.

Then the aeroplane took a sharp downward dive into the mass of black tumbling clouds, plunging like a steamer on an angry sea.

"Storm center!" yelled Oakley again. "If we can strike the right level we can beat through."

Then came an ear-splitting crash of thunder, followed almost on the instant by a flooding downfall of rain.

The recurring, appalling crashes of thunder were but little more terrifying than the continual howl of the wind through the braces, and the roar—the incessant gatling-gun explosions of the motors. Dahl cast a despairing glance at Oakley who was crouching low over the wheel, motionless. In his pose was power, dominant confident power and the Governor caught a touch of hope.

AGAIN Oakley warped the planes, seeking higher level; and again they rose above the clouds, up among myriads of scintillating stars. But the wind, still wild and forceful, came in treacherous gusts, and after several circling flights, still higher, Oakley yelled:

"Have to try it lower again! This is driving us back toward Calgary!"

He made a long downward sweep. The aerostat pointer dropped from twenty-two hundred feet to six hundred; then the aeronaut leveled her and shifted the throttle. Dahl saw the instant response on the indicator to ninety—ninety-five—one hundred miles, and Oakley's voice rang out:

"We've hit it—the right current! We'll beat the gale in a few moments!"

Then, although they felt a decided cessation of the furious squalls, one sudden fearful gust—almost an explosion—struck them. Dahl heard a ringing snap, as sharp as a revolver shot, and one of the wings careened. Instantly the airship heeled over on her side. There was a downward plunge, with the men clinging to the braces, and then a crash into the tops of great pines; a struggle of the machine as she forced in deeper, her rods and braces entangled in the boughs, and her motors still racing wildly. Then the noise ceased. Dahl, prostrate among wires, cordage, braces and pine-boughs, saw Oakley in the unextinguished light of the hood-bulb, also tangled in the wreckage, but his voice cried:

"How is it with you, Phil? Are you there?"

"Here, and all right so far!"

Cautiously they wriggled free, grasping heavy limbs for their descent to earth. Once there, they grasped hands over their marvelous escape from injury.

"Where are we, I wonder?" exclaimed Oakley.

"I caught sight of lights—town or village lights, just before we were wrecked," informed Dahl. "They were partly back of us—northeast, I should say; and perhaps five miles away. It's hard to make out distances on such a night."

"Couldn't see five miles, possibly, in such a mist. I doubt if it could be two. It must be Baysville. There's no other town or village through here."

He struck a match, looked at his watch and exclaimed:

"Eight-forty-seven! Thirty-two minutes from Calgary—over forty miles, Dahl! That's some traveling through such a storm—the worst I ever went through."

"And your machine wrecked," the Governor groaned.

"I'll probably save the engines," retorted the other cheerily. "Well, let's travel. We may strike a trail through here somewhere."

They struck one in a few minutes and followed it north.

They knew that their only refuge, their only help, lay at Baysville.

They trudged over the road for two miles. Then the beat of horses' hoofs came from the rear. They stepped to the edge of the trail and hailed the wagon, which was at once halted.

"Going to Baysville?" asked the Governor.

"We are!" responded the driver. Two men were on the front seat, and between that and the rear seat a figure crouched with a blanket around it.

"We'll pay anything for a ride with you," urged the Governor. Then a hand crept from the blanket, touched his arm and a voice rippled—

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"Dolly!"

And the next instant Elna, stretching over the side of the wagon, was in her husband's arms.

CHAPTER IX

WIRE WORK

NO PASSENGER trains went through Baysville at night, but there was a freight, and Governor Dahl's inquiries about the schedule showed him that the heavy train would carry him over the forty miles to the border as quickly as he could ride a horse—or a relay of horses, if they had been obtainable.

He left his wife to take the first train in the morning, and at 2 A. M. he was in Washakie and his first message to his secretary in Boise was gliding over the wires.

Washakie. 2 A. M. J. C. Collingwood, Executive Mansion. Boise. Just arrived here. Send word about the bill. Use cipher. Let no one know I'm here. DAHL.

At 2.30 he received the answer:

Bill now being voted on. Night session. Lieutenant-Governor in office ready to sign. Leaders had word two hours ago that you were in Calgary, Canada. COLLINGWOOD.

The Governor, with a sigh of infinite relief, dropped down on some burlaps in a corner of the telegraph-office. His anxiety over the bill was at an end. He was in Idaho when it went to a vote, and any action of the Lieutenant-Governor was illegal.

No train would go through Washakie until nine o'clock in the morning; so he dropped asleep, after imperative instructions to the operator to wake him if another message came.

It was past six o'clock before he heard again—this time from his father-in-law, Bentler:

Dahlhurst. 6 A. M. Worked across into Lost Streak. Got Steyne and Bull. Steyne can't be brought out yet. Has confessed to plot. Forced young Lisby to write that letter. Snowcraft put up money. BENTLER.

An hour later another message came from Boise:

Boise. 7 A. M. Papers just on street. Intense excitement. Wire from Bentler to *Gazette* said you were in Idaho when bill passed. Says he caught kidnapers. One confessed. Snowcraft seen taking early train for New York. COLLINGWOOD.

Then, a little later:

Boise. 7.30 A. M. City in uproar. Friends leaving on special to meet you at Dahlhurst. Authorities have wired police in East to arrest Snowcraft for conspiracy. COLLINGWOOD.

THE YOUNG WEST

by MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

FAR LAND, star land, land of the palm and pine,
Blue skies, new skies, mine and mine and mine!
Land of the hills of poppy gold, land of the legends yet untold,
Land where youth is in the blood like wine, wine, wine!

New land, true land, land of the heart's desire,
Glad land, mad land, land of the Gipsy fire!
Land where each man you meet's a friend, fabled land of the rainbow's end,
Land where hearts are true and strong, and friendships never tire.

Far land, star land, land that I love the best,
Glad land, mad land, land where all life has zest!
Land of the naked heart and soul, where each man wins to his own far goal,
Land where all the dreams are true, the West, West, West!

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The Winds Of The World

A Three-Part Story, Conclusion

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Hookum Hai," "The Soul of a Regiment," "Gulbaz and the Game," etc.

SYNOPSIS—At the house of *Yasmini*, the entrancing, gather plotters and politicians from all India, and with them Subahdar-major *Ranjoor Singh*, a Sikh officer of "Outram's Own," who by foreign tradesmen is offered much if he will influence the Sikhs to fail England, should gathering war-clouds break. *Singh* withholds his answer, kicks a despised Afridi hillman aside, and goes to the barracks. The Afridi, in revenge, knifes a Sikh trooper and is pursued by a second whom he traps in an old house. Learning of the murder, the subahdar-major goes hunting on his own account. A fat babu points the way to *Singh*, the latter breaks into the house single-handed—and does not reappear.

Kirby, Colonel of "Outram's Own," who has steadily refused to believe treachery possible in the regiment, is forced to send for *Singh* in the face of proof that the latter has associated with German merchants at *Yasmini's*. The subahdar-major can not be found. In the meantime war is declared. Knowing that his regiment will be among the first to sail for Europe, refused immediate assistance from the police, and having no authority to make an official search, *Kirby* in desperation sets out with *Captain Warrington* to find *Singh*. They are directed to the old house wherein *Singh* was said to have gone. The house they find in flames.

The search for Subahdar-major *Singh* leads *Kirby* and *Warrington* to the house of *Yasmini*. Here they receive a series of shocks. She shows an astonishing knowledge of the inner wheels of the Indian Government, she assures them that she knew of the pending world war, and then she forces them to beg for *Singh* on their knees, after which, at the door, a fat babu flashes at them the subahdar-major's ring.

Straightway throwing the babu into their carriage they try to force news of *Singh* from him. But he escapes, leaving his loin-cloth in *Warrington's* hand. In the cloth, however, is a note from the subahdar-major himself, asking that he be listed in "Orders" as detailed on special service. Later, *Warrington* catches the babu on the barrack grounds, but has to pay the latter hush money and let him depart, lest it become common knowledge that they have frequented *Yasmini's* house.

Next, *Warrington* is surprised to find two troopers grooming *Singh's* charger, *Bagh*. "Through a fat babu, we have been ordered by the subahdar-major to hold his charger in readiness; also the subahdar has promised that he will appear ere the blood runs," they state. And the adjutant allows them to proceed.

Kirby receives orders to leave at once. In vain he appeals first to a civil officer, then to the General for news of *Singh*. Passing one of Delhi's gates, as the regiment rides away, *Warrington* thinks he sees Subahdar-major *Ranjoor Singh* in disguise. *Kirby* gallops back, but the man has vanished.

X

"Now a trap," said the tiger, "is easy to spot,"
(Oh, jungli, be seated and listen!)
"Some tempt you with live bait, and others do not;"
(Oh, jungli, be leery and listen!)
"The easiest sort to detect have a door—
A box, with three walls and a roof and a floor—
That the veriest, hungriest cub should ignore."
(Oh, jungli, stop laughing and listen!)
"This isn't a trap, as I'll show you, my friend."
But the tiger fell into it. That is the end.
(Oh, jungli, be loving and listen!)

Yasmini's Song.

RANJOOR SINGH, on the trail of a murderer, shoved with his whole weight and strength against a little door of the House-of-the-Eight-Half-Brothers. It yielded suddenly. He shot in headlong, and it slammed behind him. As he fell forward into pitch blackness he was conscious of shooting bolts behind, and of the squeaking of a beam swung into place.

But, having served the Raj for more

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years than he wanted to remember, through three campaigns in the Himalayas, once against the Masudis and once in China, he was in full possession of trained soldier senses. Darkness, he calculated instantly, was a shield to him who can use it, and a danger only to the unaware; and there are grades of wariness, just as there are grades of sloth.

Two men who thought themselves so wide awake as to be beyond the reach of the Government, each threw a noosed rope, and caught each other. Ranjoor Singh could not see the ropes, but he could hear the stifled swearing and the ensuing struggle; and an ear is as good as an eye in the dark.

Something—he never knew what—warned him to duck and step forward. He felt the whistle of a club that missed him by so little as to make the skin twitch on the back of his neck.

His right leg shot sideways, and he tripped a man. In another second he had the club, and there was no measurable interval of time then before the darkness was a living miracle of blows that came from everywhere and missed nothing.

Three men went down, and Ranjoor Singh was in command of a situation whose wherefore and possibilities he could not guess until an electric torch declared itself twenty feet away, at more than twice his height, and he stood vignetted in a circle of white light.

"The sahib proves a gentle guest!" purred a voice he thought he recognized. It was a woman's. "Has the sahib a pistol with him?"

Ranjoor Singh, cursing his own neglect of soldierly precaution, saw fit not to answer. A human arm reached like a snake into the ring of light. He struck at it with the club, and a groan announced that he had struck hard enough.

"Does the sahib think that the noise of a pistol would cause his friends to come? Is Ranjoor Singh ashamed? Speak, sahib! Is it well to break into a house and be surly with the hostess?"

Ranjoor Singh stepped backward, and the ring of light followed him, until he stood pressed against the teak door and could feel the heavy beam that ran up and down it locked firmly above and below. He prodded over his head behind him with the club, trying to find what held the beam, and the ring of light lifted a foot or two, then five feet, until its center was on the center of the club's handle.

A pistol cracked and flashed then, from behind the light, and the club splintered. He dropped it, and the torch-light ceased, leaving him dazed, but not so dazed that he did not hear a man sneak up and carry the splintered club away. He followed after the man, for he knew now that he was in a narrow passage and no man could get by him to attack from behind.

But again the torch-light sought him out. Half way to the foot of steep stairs that he could dimly outline, he halted, for advance against hidden pistol-fire and dazzling light was futile.

"Look!" said the same soft, woman's voice. "Look, sahib! See, Ranjoor Singh! The hooded death! See the hooded death behind you!"

It was not her command that made him look. He knew better than to turn his head at an unseen woman's bidding in the dark. But he heard them hiss, and he turned to see four cobras come toward him, with the front third of their bodies raised from the floor and their hoods extended. He saw that a panel in the wooden wall had slid, and the last snake's tail was yet inside the gap. There was no need of a man to slip between him and the door!

"There are more in the wall, Ranjoor Singh! Will they follow thee upstairs? See, they come! Step quickly, for the hooded death is swift!"

The light went out again, and his ears were all he had to warn him of the snakes' approach—ears and imagination. Swift as a well-launched charge of light cavalry, he leaped for the stairs and took them four at a time. He reached the top one sooner than he knew it. The torch flashed in his eyes, and he saw a pistol-mouth just beyond arm-reach.

"Stand, Ranjoor Singh!" said a voice that he felt sure he recognized. His eyes began to search beyond the light for glimpses of dim outline.

"Back, Ranjoor Singh! Back to the right—toward that door! In, through that door—so!"

HE OBEYED, since he knew now with whom he had to deal. There was no sense at all in taking liberties with Yasmini. He stepped into a bare, dark, teak-walled room, and she followed

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him, and she had scarcely closed the door at her back before another door opened at the farther end, and two of her maids appeared, carrying candle-lamps.

"What do you want with me?" demanded Ranjoor Singh.

"Nay! Did I invite the sahib?"

"I came about a murderer who entered by that door through which I came."

"To pay him the reward, perhaps?" she asked impudently.

"Is this thy house?" asked Ranjoor Singh.

"This is the House-of-the-Eight-Half-Brothers, sahib."

"This is a hole where murderers hide! A man of mine was slain in the street below, and the murderer came in here. Where is he now?"

"He and the bigger fool who followed him," said Yasmini, poising herself like a nodding blossom and smiling like the promise of new love, as she paused to be insolent and let the insolence sink home, "are at my mercy!"

Ranjoor Singh did not answer, but she could draw no amusement from his silence, for his eye was unafraid.

"I am from the North, where the quality of mercy is thought weakness," she smiled sweetly.

"Who asks mercy? I was seen and heard to enter. There will be a hundred seeking me within an hour!"

"Sahib, within two hours there will be five thousand around this house, yet none will seek to enter! And they will find no murderer, though thou shalt see thy murderer. Come this way, sahib."

A whiff of warm wind might have blown her, so swiftly, lissomely she ran toward the other door, laughing back at him across her shoulder and leaving a trail of aromatic scent. The two maids held their candle-lanterns high, and striding like a soldier Ranjoor Singh followed Yasmini, not caring that the maids shut the heavy door behind him and bolted it. He argued to himself that he was as safe in one room as in another, and she as dangerous; also, that it made no difference in which room he might be when the squadron or his colonel missed him.

"Look, Ranjoor Singh! Look through that hole!"

There was plenty of light in this room, for there was a lantern in every corner. He could see that she was gazing through a hole in the wall at something that amused her, and she motioned to another hole eight feet away from it. He crossed a floor that was solid and age-old; no two planks of it were of even width or length, but none creaked.

At her invitation he looked through the little square hole she pointed out. And then, for the first time, he confessed surprise.

"Thou. Jagut Singh!" he exclaimed.

He stepped back, blinked to reassure himself, and stepped to the hole again. Back to back, tied right hand to right, left hand to left, so that their arms were crossed behind them, and lashed waist to waist, a trooper of D Squadron and the Afridi whom he had kicked at Yasmini's, sat on the floor facing opposite walls. Dumb misery was stamped on the Sikh's face, the despair of evaporated savagery on the Afridi's.

"Jagut Singh!" said the Subahdar-major, louder this time, and the trooper looked up, almost as if hope had been that instant born in him.

"Jagut Singh!"

The trooper grinned. A white row of ivory showed between his black beard and mustache. He tried to look sideways, but the rope that held him tight to the Afridi hurt his neck.

"I knew it, sahib!" he shouted. "I knew that one would come for me! This hill wildcat has fought until the ropes cut both of us, but take time, sahib! I can wait. Attend to the duty first. Only let him who comes bring water, for this is a thirsty place!"

Ranjoor Singh looked sideways. He could see that Yasmini was absorbed in contemplation of her prisoners. Her little, lithe form was pressed tightly against the wall, less than two yards away. He could guess, and he had heard a dozen times, that dancing had made her stronger than a panther and more swift. Yet he thought that if he had her in his arms, he could crush those light ribs until she would yield and order her prisoner released. The trooper's confidence deserved immediate, not postponed reward.

He watched for a minute. He could see that her bosom rose and fell regularly against the woodwork; she was all unconscious of her danger, he was sure of it. He

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changed his position, and she neither looked nor moved. He changed it again, so that his weight was all on his left foot; he was sure she had not noticed. Then he sprang.

He sprang sideways as a horse does that sees a snake by the roadside, every nerve and sinew keyed to the tightest pitch—eye, ear and instinct working together. And she, in the same second, turned to meet him smiling, with outstretched arms, as if she would meet him half way and hug him to her bosom, only she stepped a pace backward instead of forward, as she had seemed to intend.

He landed where he had meant to, on the spot where she had stood. His left hand clutched at the wall, and a second too late he made a wild grab at the hole she had peered through, trying to get his fingers into it. What she had done he never knew, but the floor she had stood on yielded, and he heard her laugh as he slipped through the opening like a tiger into a pit-trap, and fell downward into blackness.

With a last tremendous effort he caught at the floor and held himself suspended by his finger-ends. But she came and trod on them, and though her weight was light, malice made her skilful and she hurt him until he had to set his teeth and drop. He would never have believed that those soft slipper-soles could have given him so much pain.

"Forget not thy trooper in his need!" she called, as he fell away through the opening. And then the trap shut.

TO HIS surprise he did not fall very far, and though he landed on an elbow and a hip he struck so softly that for a moment he believed he must be mad, or dead, or dreaming. Then his fingers, numb from Yasmini's pressure, began to recognize the feel of gunny-bags and of cotton wool, and of paper. Also, he smelled kerosene or something very like it.

"Forget not the water for thy trooper, Ranjoor Singh!"

He looked up to see Yasmini's face framed in the opening, and he thought there was more devilment expressed in it, for all her loveliness, than in her voice that never quite lost its hint of laughter. He did not answer, and the trap-door closed again.

He knelt and began to grope through the dark on hands and knees, but gave that up presently because the dust from old sacks and piles of rubbish began to choke him. Then rats came to investigate him. He heard several of them scamper close, and one bit his leg; so he made ready to fight for his life against the worst enemy a man may have, praying a little in the Sikh way, that does not reckon God to be far off at any time.

Suddenly the trap-door opened, and the rats scampered away from the light and noise.

"Thus is a soldier answered!" muttered Ranjoor Singh.

"Is the Subahdar-major sahib thirsty?" wondered Yasmini.

He could hear her pouring water out of a brass ewer into a dish, and pouring it back again. The metal rang and the water splashed deliciously, but he was not very thirsty yet; he had been thirstier on parade a hundred times. He did not trouble to look at her this time when her head and shoulders darkened the aperture.

"Is it dark down there?" she asked him, but he did not answer.

So she struck a match, and lit a newspaper. In a moment a ball of fire was floating downward to him, and it was then that the smell of dust and kerosene entered his consciousness as pincers enter the flesh of men in torment. He stood up with hands upstretched to catch the fire—caught it—bore it downward—and smothered it in gunny-bags.

"Still dark?" she said, looking through the aperture once more. "I will send another one!"

So Ranjoor Singh found his tongue and cursed her with a force and comprehensiveness that only Asia can command; he gave her to understand that the next fire she dropped on him should be allowed to work God's will and burn her—rats—cobras—and her cut-throat. Two honest Sikhs, he swore, would die well to such an end.

"Drop thy fire and I will fan the flame!" he vowed, and she believed him.

"I will send my cobras down to keep the sahib company!" she mocked.

But Ranjoor Singh proposed to take one danger at a time, and he was quite sure that she wanted him alive, not dead, for otherwise he would have been dead already. He held his tongue and listened while she splashed the water.

"Thy trooper is very thirsty, sahib!"

She was on a warmer scent now, for that

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squadron of his and the men of his squadron were the one love of his warrior life. Some spirit of malice whispered her as much.

"The trooper shall have water when Ranjoor Singh sahib has promised on his Sikh honor."

"Promised what?" His voice betrayed interest at last; it suggested future possibilities instead of a grim present.

"That he will do what is required of him!"

"Is that the price of a drink for Jagut Singh?"

"Aye! Will the sahib pay, or will he let the trooper parch?"

"Ask Jagut Singh! Go, ask him! Let it be as he answers!"

He could hear her hurry away, although she slammed the trap-door shut. Evidently she was not satisfied to speak through the little hole, and he suspected that she was showing the man water, perhaps giving some to the Afridi for sweet suggestion's sake. She was back within five minutes, and by the way she opened the trap and grinned at him he knew what her answer would be.

"He begs that you promise! He begs, sahib! He says he is thy trooper, thy dog, thy menial, and very thirsty!"

"Bring some one who knows better how to lie!" said Ranjoor Singh. "I *know* what his answer was! He said, 'Say to the Subahdar-major sahib that I have eaten salt, but I am not thirsty!' Go, tell him his answer was a good one, and that I know he said it! I know that man, as men know each other. Thou art a woman, and thy knowledge is but emptiness. Thou hast heard now twice what the answer is, once from him and once from me!"

"I will leave thee to the rats!" she said, slamming the trap-door tight.

The rats came, and he began to grope about for a weapon to use against them. He caught one rat in his fingers, squeezed the squealing brute to death and flung it away, and he heard a hundred of its messmates race to devour the carcass.

He began to see little active eyes around him in the blackness, that watched his every movement, and he kept moving since that seemed to puzzle them. Also he wondered, as a drowning man might wonder about things, how long it would be before Colonel Kirby would send for him to ask about the murdered trooper. Something would happen then, he knew; he suspected it would be known then within thirty minutes which door he had entered.

After that, although the rats had grown very daring and he had been bitten again twice, he found time to wonder what lies Yasmini would tell to account for her share in things. He did not doubt she would lie herself out of it, but he wondered just how, along what unexpected line. It began to seem to him that the Colonel and his squadron were a very long time coming.

"But they will come!" he assured himself.

He was nearer to the mark when he expected unexpectedness from Yasmini, for she did not disappoint him. A door opened at one end of the black, dark cellar, and again the rats scampered for cover as Yasmini herself stood framed in it, with a lantern above her head. She was alone, and he could not see that she had any weapon.

"THIS way, sahib!" she called sweetly.

Never—North, South, East, or West, in olden days or modern—did a siren call half so seductively. Every move she ever made was poetry expressed, but framed in a golden aura shed by the lamp, and swaying in the velvet blackness of the pit's mouth, she was as—it seemed to Ranjoor Singh—no man had ever seen woman yet.

"Come, sahib!" she called again, and he rose to his feet.

"Food and water wait! Thy trooper has drunk his fill. Come, sahib!"

She made no move at all to protect herself from him. She did not lead into the cavern beyond the door. She waited for him, leaning against the door-post and smiling as if she and he were old friends who understood each other.

"I but tried thee, Ranjoor Singh!" she smiled, looking up into his face and holding the lantern closer to his eyes, as if she would read behind them. "Thou art a soldier, and not a buffalo at all! I am sorry that I called thee buffalo. My heart goes out ever to a brave man, Ranjoor Singh!"

He was actually at her side; her clothes touched his, and he could have flung his arms around her. But it was the move next after that that seemed obscure. He wondered what her reply would be; and moving the lantern a little she read the hesitation in his eyes—the wavering between

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desire for vengeance, a soldierly regard for sex, and mistrust of her apparent helplessness. And, being Yasmini, she dared him.

"Like swords I have seen!" she laughed. "Two cutting edges and a point! Not to be held save by the hilt, eh, Ranjoor Singh? Search me for weapons first, and then use that dagger in thy hair—I am unarmed!"

"Lead on!" he commanded in a voice that grated harshly, for it needed all his willpower to prevent his self-command from seeping out. He knew that behind temptation of any kind there lie the iron teeth of unexpected consequences.

She let the lantern swing below her knees and leaned back to laugh at him, until the cavern behind her echoed as if all the underworld had seen and was amused.

"I called thee a buffalo!" she panted. "Nay, I was very wrong! I laugh at my mistake! Come, Ranjoor Singh!"

With a swing of the lantern and a swerve of her lithe body, she slipped out of his reach and danced down an age-old hewn-stone passage, out of which doors seemed to lead at every six or seven yards; only the doors were all made fast with iron bolts so huge that it would take two men to manage them.

He hurried after her. But the faster he followed the faster she ran, until it needed little imagination to conceive her a will o' the wisp and himself a crazy man.

"Come!" she kept calling to him. "Come!"

And then she commenced to sing, as if dark passages beneath the Delhi streets were a fit setting for her skill and loveliness. Ranjoor Singh had never heard the song before. It was about a tiger who boasted and fell into a trap. It made him more cautious than he might have been, and when the darkness began to grow less opaque he slowed into a walk. Then he stood still, for he could not see her any longer.

It occurred to him to turn back. But that thought had not more than crossed his mind when a noose was pulled tight around his legs and a big sheet, thrown out of the darkness, was wrapped and wrapped about him until he could neither shout nor move. He knew that they were women who managed the sheet because he bit one's finger through it and she screamed. Then he heard Yasmini's voice, close to his ear.

"Thy Colonel-sahib and another are outside!" she whispered. "It is not well to wait here, Ranjoor Singh!"

Next he felt a great rush of air, and after that the roar of flame was so unmistakable—although he could feel no heat yet—that he wondered whether he was to be burned alive.

"Is it well alight?" asked Yasmini.

"Yes!" said a maid whose teeth chattered.

"Good! Presently the fools will come and pour water enough to fill this passage. Thus none may follow us! Come!"

Ranjoor Singh was gathered up and carried by frightened women—he could feel them tremble. For a moment he felt the outer air, and he caught the shout of a crowd that had seen flames. Then he was thrown face downward on the floor of some sort of carriage and driven away.

He lost all sense of direction after a moment, though he did not forget to count, and by his rough reckoning he was driven through the streets for about nine minutes at a fast trot. Then the carriage stopped, and he was carried out again, up almost endless stairs, across a floor that seemed yet more endless, and thrown into a corner.

He heard a door slam shut, and almost at the same moment his fingers, that had never once ceased working, tore a corner of the sheet loose. In another minute he was free.

HE THREW the sheet from him and looked about, accustoming his eyes to darkness. Presently, not far from him, he made out the sheeted figure of another man who lay exactly as he had done and worked with tired fingers. He drew the dagger out of his hair and cut the man loose.

"Jagut Singh!" he exclaimed.

The trooper stood up and saluted.

"Who brought thee here?"

"Women, sahib, in a carriage!"

"When?"

"Even now!"

"Where is that Afridi?"

"Dead, sahib!"

"How?"

"She brought us water in a brass vessel, saying it was by thy orders, sahib. She cut us loose and gave him water first. Then, while she gave me to drink, the Afridi attacked her, and I slew him with my hands, tearing his throat out—thus! While the

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life yet fluttered in him they threw a sheet over me—and here I am! Salaam, sahib!"

The trooper saluted again.

"Who made thee prisoner in the first place?"

"Hillmen, sahib, at the orders of the Afridi who is now dead. They made ready to torture me, showing me the knives they would use. But she came, and they obeyed her, binding the Afridi fast to me. After that I heard the sahib's voice, and then this happened. That is all, sahib."

"Well!" said Ranjoor Singh. And for the third time his trooper saw fit to salute him.

XI

Who shall be trusted to carry my trust?
(Hither, and answer me, stranger!)
Slow to give ground be he—swifter to thrust—
Instant,—yet wary o' danger!
Hand without craftiness, eye without lust,
Lip without flattery! Such an one must
Prove yet his worthiness—yet earn my trust!
(Closer, and answer me, stranger!)
First let me lead him alone, and apart;
There let me feel of his pulse and his heart!
(Hither, and play with me, stranger!)

MEN say Yasmini does not sleep, and of course that is absurd; but it is none the less certain that she must do much of her plotting in the daytime, for by night, until after midnight, she is always the Yasmini whom the Northern gentry know, at home to all comers in her wonderful apartment.

It is ever a mystery to them how she knows all that is going on in Delhi, and in India, and in the greater outer world, although they themselves bring her information that no Government could ever suck out of the silent hills. They know where she keeps her cobras—where the strongbox is in which her jewels lie crowded—who run her errands—and some of her past history, for not even a mongoose is more inquisitive than a man born in the hills, and Yasmini has many maids. But none—not even her favorite, most confidential maids—knows what is in the little room that she reaches down a private flight of stairs that has a steel door at the top.

She keeps the key to that steel door, and it has, besides, a combination lock that only she understands.

Once, a very clever hillman, who had been south for an education and had learned skepticism in addition to the rule of three, undertook to discover wires leading over roof-tops to that room; but he searched for a week and did not find them. When his search was over, and all had done laughing at him, he was found one night with a knife-wound between his shoulder-blades, and later still Yasmini sang a song about him. None searched for wires after that, and the consensus of opinion still is that she makes magic in the room below-stairs.

She sought that room the minute Ranjoor Singh was safely locked in with his trooper, although her maids reported more than one Northern gentleman waiting impatiently in the larger of her two reception-rooms for official information of the war. (Government bulletins are regarded as pure fiction always, unless confirmed by Yasmini.)

And within five minutes of Ranjoor Singh's release of his trooper from the sheet, no less a personage than a general officer had thrown aside other business and had drawn on a cloak of secrecy that not even his own secretary could penetrate.

"Closed carriage!" he ordered; and as if the fire-brigade were doing double duty, a carriage came and the horses, rump-down, halted from the gallop outside his door.

"Pathan turban!" he ordered; and his servant brought him one.

"Sheepskin cloak!"

In a moment the upper half of him would have passed in the dark for that of a rather portly Northern trader. He decided that a rug would do the rest, and snatched one as he ran for the carriage with the turban under his arm. He gave no order to the driver other than "*chelo!*" and that means "go ahead;" so the driver, who was a Sikh, went ahead as the guns go into action, a-sway and a-swing, regardless of almost everything but speed.

"Yasmini's!" said the General at the end of a hundred yards; and the Sikh took a square, right angle turn at full gallop with a neatness the Horse Artillery could not have bettered. There seemed to be no need of further instructions, for the Sikh pulled up unbidden at the private door that is to all appearance only a mark on the dirty-looking wall.

With a rug around his middle there shot out then what a watching small boy described afterwards as "a fat hill-rajah on his way to be fleeced." The carriage drove on, for coachmen who wait outside Yasmini's door are likely to be butts for questions.

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The door opened without any audible signal, and the man with the rug around his middle disappeared.

HE HAD ceased to bear any resemblance to any one but a stout English General in mess-dress by the time he reached the dark stair-head; and Yasmini took the precaution of being there alone to meet him. She held a candle-lantern.

"Whom have you?" he demanded.

They seemed to understand each other —these two. He paid her no compliments, and she expected none; she made no attempt at all to flatter him or deceive him. But, being Yasmini, it did not lie in her to answer straightly.

"I set a trap and a buffalo blundered into it! He will do better than any other!"

"Whom have you?"

"Subahdar-major Ranjoor Singh!"

The General whistled softly.

"Of the Sikh Light Cavalry?" he asked.

"One of Kirby sahib's officers, and a man of his into the bargain!"

The General whistled again.

"There were two troopers whom I meant to catch," she said hurriedly, for it was evident that the General did not at all approve of the turn affairs had taken. "I had a trap for them at the House-of-the-Eight-Half-Brothers, and some hillmen in there ready to rush out and seize them as they passed. But a fool Afridi murdered one, and I only got there in the nick of time to save the other's life. I meant that Ranjoor Singh, who is a buffalo, should be troubled about his troopers and suspected on his own account, for he and I have a private quarrel. I did not mean to catch him, or make use of him. But he walked into the trap. What shall be done with him? Let the sahib say the word, and——"

Her gesture was inimitable. Not so the gurgle that she gave, for a man's breath bubbling through the blood of a slit throat makes the same shuddersome sound exactly. The General took no notice whatever of that, for wise men of the West understand the East's attempts to scandalize them. It is the everlasting amusement of Yasmini and a thousand others, to pretend that the English are even more blood-careless than themselves, just as it is their practise to build confidently on the opposite fact.

"Did *you* fire the House-of-the-Eight-Half-Brothers?" asked the General suddenly.

"Am I a sweeper?" she retorted.

"Did you order it done?"

"Did Jumna rise when the rain came? There were six good cobras of mine burned alive, to say nothing of the bones of a dead Afridi! Nay, sahib, I ordered a clear trail left from there to here, connecting me and thee and Ranjoor Singh to the Germans and a dog of an Afridi murderer. I left a trail that even the police could follow!"

"Whose property is that house?"

"Whose? Ask the lawyers! They have fought about it in the courts until lawyers own every stick and stone of it, and now the lawyers fight one another! The Government will spend a year now," she laughed, "seeking whom to fine for the fire. It will be good to see the lawyers run to cover!"

"This is a bad business!" said the General sternly, and he used two words in the native tongue that are thirty times more expressive of badness as applied to machinations than are the English for them. "The plan was to kidnap a trooper, or two troopers—to tempt him, or them—and should they prove incorruptible to give them certain work to do. And what have you done?"

Yasmini laughed at him—merry, mocking laughter that stung him because it was so surely genuine. She did not need tell him in words that she was not afraid of him; she could laugh in his face and make the truth sink deeper.

"And now what will the *burra* sahib do?" she mocked. "There is war—a great war—a war of all the world—but Yasmini fired a rat-run and avenged a murdered Sikh. First let us punish Yasmini! Shall I send for police to arrest me, *burra* sahib? Or shall I send a maid in search of babu Sita Ram, that the game may continue?"

"What do you want Sita Ram for?"

"Sita Ram is nearly always useful, sahib. He is on a message now. He is a fool who likes to meddle where he *thinks* none notice him. Such are the sort who cost least and work the longest hours. Who, for instance, sahib, is to balk Kirby sahib when he grows suspicious and begins to search in earnest for his Ranjoor Singh? He knew that Ranjoor Singh was at the House-of-the-Eight-Half-Brothers; there was a man on watch outside. He will come here next, for Ranjoor Singh has been reported to him as having talked with Germans in my house."

"Reported by whom?"

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"By the Afridi who is now dead."

"Who killed the Afridi?"

"Does the *burra* sahib think I killed him?"

"I asked a question!" snapped the General.

"In the first place, then, Ranjoor Singh, the buffalo, struck the Afridi with his foot. The Afridi, who was a dog with yellow teeth, went outside to sing sweet compliments to Ranjoor Singh. Certain Sikhs heard him—of whom one was the trooper who waits in another room with Ranjoor Singh—and they beat him nearly to death because, being buffaloes themselves, they love Ranjoor Singh, who is the greatest buffalo of all.

For revenge, the Afridi told tales of Ranjoor Singh and later knifed one Sikh trooper who had beaten him. The other trooper followed him into the House-of-the-Eight-Half-Brothers, where he soon had opportunity for vengeance. Now the *burra* sahib knows all. Is it not a sweet love-story? Now the *burra* sahib may arrest everybody, and all will be well!"

"Where did Ranjoor Singh kick the Afridi?"

"Here—in my house!"

"Then, he was here?"

"How else would he kick the man here? Could he send his foot by messenger?"

"Was the German here? Did he have word with the German?"

"Surely. He spoke with him alone. So the Afridi reported him to the 'Rat sahib.'"

The General frowned. However deeply the military may intrigue, they neither like nor profess to like civilians who play the same game.

"If Ranjoor Singh is under suspicion, what is the use of——"

"Oh, all men are alike!" jeered Yasmini, holding up the light and looking more impudent than the General had ever seen her—and he had seen her often, for most of his private information about the regions north of the Himalayas had come through her in one way or another, and often enough from her lips direct. "I have said that Ranjoor Singh is a buffalo! He was born a buffalo—he has been trained to be one by the British—he likes to be one—and he will die one, with a German bullet in his belly, unless this business prove too much for him and he dies of fretting before he can get away to fight!

"I—look at me, sahib! I have tempted Ranjoor Singh, and he did not yield a hair! I stood closer to him than I am to you, and his pulse beat no faster! All he thought of was whether he could crush me and make me give up my prisoner.

"Ranjoor Singh is a buffalo of buffaloes—a Jat buffalo of no imagination and no sense. He is buffalo enough to love the British Raj and his squadron of Jat farmers with all his stupid Sikh heart! There *could* not be a better for the purpose than this Ranjoor Singh! He is stupid enough, and nearly blunt enough to be an Englishman. He is just of the very caliber to fool a German! Trust me, sahib—I, who picked the man who——"

"That'll do!" said the General, and Yasmini laughed again like a silver bell.

There came then a soft rap on the door. It opened about six inches and a maid whispered.

"Wait!" ordered Yasmini. "Come through! Wait here!" She pulled the maid through the door to the little back stair-head landing. "Did you hear?" she hissed excitedly. "She says Kirby sahib has come, and another with him!"

She was twitching with excitement. Her fingers clutched the General's sleeve, and he found himself thinking of his youth. He released her fingers gently and she spared a giggle for him.

"Bad business!" said the General again. "Kirby will ask questions and go away. But the troopers of Ranjoor Singh's squadron will come later, and they will not go away in such a hurry. You can fool Colonel Kirby sahib, but you can not fool a hundred troopers!"

"No?" she purred. She had done thinking and was herself again, impudent and artful. "I can fool anybody, and any thousand men! I sent Sita Ram already with a message to the troopers of Ranjoor Singh's squadron. The message was supposed to be from him, and it was worded just as he would have worded it. Presently Sita Ram will come back, when he has helped himself to payment. Then I can send him with yet another message.

"Go and put thoughts into the buffalo's head, General sahib, and be quick! There must be a message—a written message from Ranjoor Singh to Kirby sahib—and a token—forget not the token, in proof that the writing is not forged! Forget not the token. There must surely be a token!"

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She pushed the General forward down a passage, through a series of doors, and down another passage—halted him while she fitted a strange, native key into a lock—opened another door, and pushed him through. Then she ran back to her maid.

"SEND somebody to find Sita Ram! Bid him hurry! When he comes put him in the small room next the cobras, and let him be shown the cobras until fear of too much talking has grown greater in him than the love of being heard! Then, let me see him in a mirror, so that I may know when it is time. Have cobras in a hair-noose ready, close behind where the sahibs sit, and watch through the hangings for my signal! Both sahibs will kneel to me. Then, watch for another signal and let all lights be blown out instantly! Or, if the sahibs do not kneel (though they *shall!*) then watch yet more closely for a signal to extinguish lights.

"So—now, go! Am I beautiful? Are my eyes bright? Twist me that jasmine in my hair—so—now run—I will surprise them through the hangings!"

So Yasmini surprised Kirby and his Adjutant, as has been told, and it need not be repeated how she humbled the pride of India's army on their knees. She would have to forego the delight of being Yasmini before she could handle any situation or plan any coup along ordinary lines, and Kirby and his Adjutant were not the first Englishmen, nor likely to be the last, to feed her merriment.

Only the General pushed without ceremony through a door, behaved with confidence, for he knew that whatever her whim or her sense of humor, or of impudence, she would not fail him in the pinch. Even Yasmini, whose jest it is to see men writhe under her hand, has to own somebody her master, and though she would giggle at the notion of fearing any one man, or any dozen, she does fear the representative of what she, and perhaps a hundred others, call "The Game." For the night, and for the place, the General was that representative, and however he might disapprove or however she might mock, he had no doubt of her.

Ranjoor Singh stood aghast at sight of him, and the trooper saluted like an automaton, since nothing save obedience was any affair of his.

"Evening, Subahdar-major!" smiled the General.

"Salaam, General sahib!"

"To save time, I will tell you that I know stage by stage how you got here."

Ranjoor Singh looked suspicious. For five-and-twenty years he had watched British justice work, that gives both sides a hearing; he had not told his own version yet.

"I know that you have had word in another part of this house with a German, who pretends to be a merchant but who is really a spy."

Ranjoor Singh looked even more suspicious. The charge was true, though, so he did not answer.

"Your being brought to this house was part of a plan—part of the same plan that leaves the German still at liberty. You are wanted to take further part in it."

"General sahib, am I an officer of the Raj, or am I dreaming?"

Ranjoor Singh had found his tongue at last, and the General noted with keen pleasure that eye, voice and manner were angry and unafraid.

"I command a squadron, sahib, unless I have been stricken mad! Since when is a squadron commander brought face-downwards in a carriage out of rat-traps by a woman, to do a General's bidding? That has been my fate tonight. Now, I am wanted to take further part! Is my honor not yet dirtied enough, General sahib? I will take no further part. I refuse to obey! I order this trooper not to obey! I demand court martial!"

"I see I'd better begin with an apology," smiled the General. He was not trying to pretend he felt comfortable.

"Nay, sahib! I would accept no apology. It must first be proved to me that he, who tells me I am wanted to take further part in this rat-hole treachery, is not a traitor to the Raj! I have read of generals turning traitor! I have read about Napoleon; I know how his generals behaved when the sand in his glass seemed run. I am for the Raj in this, and in any other hour! I refuse to obey, or to accept apology! Let the explanation be made me at court martial, with Colonel Kirby sahib present to bear witness to my character!"

"As you were!"

The General's eyes met those of the Sikh officer, and neither could have told then, or

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at any other time, what exactly it was that each man recognized.

"Ranjoor Singh, when I entered this house ten minutes ago I had no notion I would find you here. I have served the same "salt" with you, on the same campaigns. I even wear the same medals. In the same house, I am entitled to the same credit.

"I am here on urgent business for the Raj, and you are here owing to a grave mistake, which I admit and for which I tender you the most sincere apology on behalf of the Government, but which I can not alter. I expected to find a trooper here, not necessarily of your regiment, who should have been waylaid and tempted beyond any doubt as to his trustworthiness.

"I received a message that Yasmini had two absolutely honest men ready, and I came at once to give them their instructions. I ask you to sacrifice your pride, as we all of us must on occasion, and your rights, as is a soldier's privilege, and see this business through to a finish. It is too late to make other arrangements, Ranjoor Singh."

"Sahib, squadron-leading is my trade! I am not cut out for rat-run soldiering! I am willing to leave this house and hold my tongue, and to take this trooper with me and see that he holds his tongue. By nine tomorrow morning I will have satisfied myself that you are for, and not against the Raj. And having satisfied myself, I and this trooper here, will hold our tongues forever. *Bass!*"

The General stood as still on his square foot of floor as did Ranjoor Singh on his. It was the fact that he did not flinch, and did not strut about, but stood in one spot with his arms behind him that confirmed Ranjoor Singh in his reading of the General's eyes.

"You may leave the house, then, and take your trooper. I accept your promise. Before you go, though, I'll tell you something. The ordering of troops for the front —for France—is in my hands. Your regiment is slated for tomorrow. But it can't go unless you'll see this through. The whole regiment will be needed instead to mount guard over Delhi."

"The regiment is to go, sahib, and my squadron, and I not? I am not to go?"

"That is the sacrifice you are asked to make!"

"Have I made no sacrifices for the Raj? How has my life been spent? Sahib——"

The Sikh's voice broke and he ceased speaking, but the General too seemed at a loss for words.

"Sahib—do I understand? If I do this —this rat-business, whatever it is—Colonel Kirby and the regiment go, and another leads my squadron? And unless I do this, whatever it is, the regiment will not go?"

The General nodded. He felt and looked ashamed.

"Has war been declared, sahib?"

"Yes. Germany has invaded Belgium."

For a second the Sikh's eyes blazed; but the fire died down again. He clasped his hands in front of him and hung his head.

"I will do this thing that I am asked to do," he said, but his words were scarcely audible. His trooper came a step closer, to be nearer to him in his minute of acutest agony.

"Thou and I, Jagut Singh! We both stay behind!"

"Now, Subahdar-major, I want you to listen! You've promised like a man," said the General. "I'll make you the best promise I can in return. Mine's conditional, but it's none-the-less emphatic. If possible, you shall catch your regiment before it puts to sea. If that's impossible, you shall take passage on another ship and try to overtake it. If that again is impossible, you shall follow your regiment and be in France in time to lead your squadron. I think I may say you are sure to be there before the regiment goes into action. But, understand—I said, 'If possible!'"

Ranjoor Singh's eye brightened and he straightened perceptibly.

"This trooper, sahib——"

"My promise is for him as well."

"We accept, sahib! What is the duty?"

"First, write a note to Colonel Kirby—I'll see that it's delivered—asking him to put your name in Orders as assigned to special duty. Here's paper and a fountain pen."

"Why should all this be secret from Colonel Kirby?" asked Ranjoor Singh. "There is no wiser, and no more loyal officer!"

"Nor any officer more pugnacious on his juniors' account, I assure you! I can't imagine his agreeing to the use I'm making of you. His regiment would have to wait, that's all!"

"Pass me the paper and the pen, sahib!"

Ranjoor Singh wrote by the light of a

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flickering oil-lamp, using the trooper's shoulder for support. He passed the finished note back to the General.

"Now, some token please, Subahdar-major, that Colonel Kirby will be sure to recognize— something to prove that the note is not forged."

Ranjoor Singh pulled a ring from his finger and held it out.

"Colonel Kirby sahib gave me this," he said simply.

"Thanks. Shake hands, will you! I've been talking to a man tonight—to two men —if I never did in my life! I shall go now and give this letter to somebody to deliver to Colonel Kirby, and I shall not see you again probably until all this is over. Please do what Yasmini directs until you hear from me, or can see for yourself that your task is finished. Depend on me to remember my promise!"

Ranjoor Singh saluted, military-wise, although he was not in uniform. The General answered his salute and left the room, to be met by a maid who took the note and the ring from him. Five minutes later, with his rough disguise resumed, the General hunted about among the shadows of the nearby streets until he had found his carriage. He recognized, but was not recognized by the *rissaldar* on the box-seat of Colonel Kirby's shay.

XII

Teeth of a wolf on a whitened bone,
What do the splinters say?
Scent of a sambur, up and gone,
Where will he stand at bay?
Sparks in the whirl of a hurrying wind,
Who was it laid the light?
Mischief, back of a woman's mind,
Why do the thoughtless fight?

BLACK smoke still billowed upward from the gutted House-of-the-Eight-Half-Brothers, and although there were few stars visible, a watery moon looked out from between dark cloud-racks and showed up the smoke above the Delhi roofs. Yasmini picked the right simile as usual. It looked as if the biggest genie ever dreamed of must be hurrying out of a fisherman's vase.

"And who is the fisherman?" she laughed, for she is fond of that sort of question that sets those near her thinking and disguises the trend of her own thoughts as utterly as if she had not any.

"The genie might be the spirit of war!" ventured a Baluchi, forgetting the one God of his Koran in a sententious effort to please Yasmini.

She flashed a glance at him.

"Or it might be the god of the Rekis," she suggested, and everybody chuckled, because Beluchis do not relish reference to their lax religious practise any more than they like to be called "desert people." This man was a Rind Baluch of the Marri hills, and proud of it; but pride is not always an asset at Yasmini's.

They—and the police would have dearly loved to know exactly who "they" were—stood clustered in Yasmini's great deep window that overlooks her garden—the garden that cannot be guessed at from the street. There was not one of them who could have explained how they came to assemble all on that side of the room; the movement had seemed to evolve out of the infinite calculation that everybody takes for granted, and Moslems particularly, since there seems nothing else to do about it.

It did not occur to anybody to credit Yasmini with the arrangement, or with the suddenly aroused interest in smoke against the after-midnight sky. Yet, when another man entered whose disguise was a joke to any practised eye—and all in the room were practised—it looked to the newcomer almost as if his reception had been ready staged.

He was dressed as a Mohammedan gentleman. But his feet, when he stood still, made nearly a right angle to each other, and his shoulders had none of the grace that goes with the pride of a native gentleman; they were proud enough, but the pride had been drilled in and cultivated. It sat square. And if a native gentleman had walked through the streets as this man walked, all the small boys of the bazaars would have followed him to learn what nation his might be.

Yasmini seemed delighted with him. She ran toward him, curtsied to him, and called him *bahadur*. She made two maids bring a chair for him, and made them set it near the middle of the window whence he could see the smoke, pushing the men away on either side until he had a clear view.

But he knew enough of the native mind at all events to look at the smoke and not remark on it. It was so obvious that he was meant to talk about the smoke, or to

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ask about it, that even a German Orientalist understanding the East through German eyes had tact enough to look in silence, and so to speak, "force trumps."

And that again, of course, was exactly what Yasmini wanted. Moreover, she surprised him by not leading trumps.

"They are here," she said with a sideways glance at the more than thirty men who crowded near the window.

THE German—and he made no pretense any longer of being anything but German—sat sideways with both hands on his knees to get a better view of them. He scanned each face carefully, and each man entertained a feeling that he had been analyzed and ticketed and stood aside.

"I have seen all these before," he said. "They are men of the North, and good enough fighters, I have no doubt. But they are not what I asked for. How many of these are trained soldiers? Which of these could swing the allegiance of a single native regiment? It is time now for proofs and deeds. The hour of talk is gone. Bring me a soldier!"

"These also say it is all talk, sahib—words, words, words! They say they will wait until the fleet that has been spoken of comes to bombard the coast. For the present there are none to rally 'round."

"Yet you hinted at soldiers!" said the German. "You hinted at a regiment ready to revolt!"

"Aye, sahib! I have repeated what *these* say. When the soldier comes there shall be other talk! See yonder smoke, *bahadur?*"

Now then it was time to notice things, and the German gazed over the garden and Delhi walls and roofs at what looked very much more important than it really was. It looked as if at least a street must be on fire.

"He made that holocaust, did the soldier!"

Yasmini's manner was of blended awe and admiration.

"He was suspected of disloyalty. He entered that house to make arrangements for the mutiny of a whole regiment of Sikhs, who are not willing to be sent to fight across the sea. He was followed to the house, and so, since he would not be taken, he burned all the houses. Such a man is he who comes presently! Did the sahib hear the mob roar when the flames burst out at evening? No? A pity! There were many soldiers in the mob, and many thousand discontented people!"

She went close to the window, to be between the German and the light, and let him see her silhouetted in an attitude of hope a-borning. She gazed at the billowing smoke as if the hope of India were embodied in it.

"It was thus in fifty-seven," she said darkly. "Men began with burnings!"

Brown eyes, behind the German, exchanged glances, for the East is chary of words when it does not understand. The German nodded, for he had studied history and was sure he understood.

"Sahib *hail*" said a sudden woman's voice, and Yasmini started as if taken by surprise. There were those in the room who knew that when taken by surprise she never started; but they were not German.

"He is here!" she whispered, and the German showed that he felt a crisis had arrived. He settled down to meet it like a soldier and a man.

"Salaam!" purred Yasmini in her silveriest voice, as Ranjoor Singh strode down the middle of the room with the dignity the West may some day learn.

"See!" whispered Yasmini. "He trusts nobody. He brings his own guard with him!"

By the door at which he had entered stood a trooper of D Squadron, Outram's Own, no longer in uniform but dressed as a Sikh servant. The man's arms were folded on his breast. The rigidity, straight stature, and attitude appealed to the German as the sight of sea did to the ancient Greeks.

"SALAAM!" said Ranjoor Singh.

The German noticed that his eyes glowed, but the rest of him was all calm dignity.

"We have met before!" said the German rising. "You are the Sikh with whom I spoke the other night—the Sikh officer—the squadron leader!"

"*Ja!*" said Ranjoor Singh, and the one word startled the German so that he caught his breath.

"*Sie sprechen Deutsch?*"

"*Ja wohl!*"

The German muttered something half under his breath that may have been meant for a compliment to Ranjoor Singh, but the Subahadar-major missed it, for he had stepped up to the nearest of the Northern

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gentlemen and confronted him. There was a great show of looking in each other's eyes, and of muttering some word and counter-word. Each made a sign with his right hand, then with his left, that the German could not see, and then Ranjoor Singh stepped sideways to the next man.

Man by man, slowly and with care, he looked each man present in the eyes and tested him for the password, while Yasmini watched admiringly.

"Any who do not know the word will die tonight!" she whispered, and the German nodded, because it was evident that the Northerners were quite afraid. He approved of that kind of discipline.

"These are all true men—patriots," said Ranjoor Singh, walking back to him. "Now say what you have to say."

"*Jetst*—" began the German.

"Speak Hindustanee that they all may understand," said Ranjoor Singh; and the others gathered closer.

"My friend, I am told——"

But Yasmini broke in, bursting between Ranjoor Singh and the German.

"Nay, let the sahibs go alone into the other room. Neither will speak his mind freely before company—is it not so? Into the other room, sahibs, while we wait here!"

Ranjoor Singh bowed, and the German clicked his heels together. Ranjoor Singh made a sign, but the German yielded precedence; so Ranjoor Singh strode ahead and the German followed him, wishing to high Heaven he could learn to walk with such consummate grace. As they disappeared through the jingling bead-curtain, the Sikh trooper followed them, and took his stand again with folded arms by the door-post. The German saw him, and smiled; he approved of that.

Then Yasmini gathered her thirty curious Northerners together around her and proceeded to entertain them while the plot grew nearer to its climax in another room. She led them back to the divans by the inner wall. She set them to smoking while she sang a song to them. She parried their questions with dark hints and innuendoes that left them more mystified than ever, yet that no man would admit he could not understand.

And then she danced to them. She danced for an hour, to the wild minor music that her women made, and she seemed to gather strength and lightness as the night wore on. Near dawn the German and Ranjoor Singh came out together, to find her yet dancing, and she ceased only to pull the German aside and speak to him.

"Does he *really* speak German?" she whispered.

"He? He has read Nietzsche and von Bernhardi in the German!"

"Who are they?"

"They are difficult to read—philosophers."

"Has he satisfied you?"

"He has promised that he will."

"Then go before I send the rest away!"

So the German tried to look like a Mohammedan again, and went below to a waiting landau. Before he was half way down the stairs Yasmini's hands gripped tight on Ranjoor Singh's forearms and she had him backed into a corner.

"Ranjoor Singh, thou art no buffalo! I was wrong! Thou art a great man, Ranjoor Singh!"

She received no answer.

"What hast thou promised him?"

"To show him a mutinous regiment of Sikhs."

"And what has he promised?"

"To show me what we seek."

She nodded.

"Good!" she said.

"So now I promise thee something," said Ranjoor Singh sternly. "Tomorrow—today—I shall eat black shame on thy account, for this is thy doing. Later I will go to France. Later again, I will come back and——"

"And love me as they all do!" laughed Yasmini, pushing him away.

XIII

If I must lie, who love the truth,
(And honor bids me lie),
I'll tell a lordly lie forsooth
To be remembered by.
If I must cheat, whose fame is fair,
And fret my fame away,
I'll do worse than the devil dare
That men may rue the day!

BEYOND question Yasmini is a craftsman of amazing skill, and her genius—as does all true genius—extends to the almost infinite consideration of small details. The medium in which she works—human weakness—affords her unlimited opportunity; and she owns the trick, that most great artists win, of not

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letting her general plan be known before the climax. Neither friend nor enemy is ever quite sure which is which until she solves the problem to the enemy's confusion.

But Yasmini could have failed in this case through overmuch finesse. She was not used to German, and could not realize until too late that her compliance with this man's every demand only served to make him more peremptory and more one-sided in his point of view. From a mere agent, offering the almost unimaginable in return for mere promises, he had grown already into a dictator, demanding action as a prelude to reward. He had even threatened to cause her, Yasmini, to be reported to the police unless she served his purpose better!

If she had obeyed the General and had picked a trooper for the business in hand, it is likely that Yasmini would have had to write a failure to her account. She had come perilously near to obedience on this occasion, and it had been nothing less than luck that put Ranjoor Singh into her hands, luck being the pet name of India's kindest god. Ranjoor Singh was needed, in the instant when he came, to bring the German back to earth and a due sense of proportion.

The Sikh had a rage in his heart that the German mistook for zeal and native ferocity; his manners became so brusque under the stress of it that they might almost have been military German, and, met with its own reflection, that kind of German attitude grows limp.

Having agreed to lie, Ranjoor Singh lied with such audacity and so much skill that it would have needed Yasmini to dare disbelieve him.

The German sat in state near Yasmini's great window and received one after another liars by the dozen from the hills where lies are current coin. Some of them had listened to his lectures, and some had learned of them at second hand; every man of them had received his cue from Yasmini. There was too much unanimity among them; they wanted too little, and agreed too readily to what the German had to say; he was growing almost suspicious toward half-past ten when Ranjoor Singh came in.

There was no trooper behind him this time, for the man had been sent to watch for the regiment's departure and to pounce then on Bagh, the charger, and take him away to safety. After the charger had been groomed and fed and hidden, the trooper was to do what might be done toward securing the Subahdar-major's kit; but under no condition was the kit to have precedence.

"Groom him until he shines! Guard him until I call for him! Keep him exercised!" was the three-fold order that sang through the trooper's head and overcame astonishment in the hurry to obey.

Now it was the German's turn to be astonished. Ranjoor Singh strode in, dressed as a Sikh farmer, and frowned down Yasmini's instant desire to poke fun at him. The German rose to salute him, and the Sikh acknowledged the salute with a nod such as royalty might spare for a menial.

"Come!" he said curtly, and the German followed him out through the door to the stair-head where so many mirrors were. There Ranjoor Singh made quite a little play of making sure they were not overheard, while the German studied his own Mohammedan disguise from twenty different angles.

"Too much finery!" growled Ranjoor Singh. "I will attend to that. First, listen! Other than your talk, and the opinion of that woman, I have had no proof at all of you! You are a spy!"

"I am a ——"

"You are a spy! All the spies I ever met were liars from the ground up! I am a patriot. I am working to save my country from a yoke that is unbearable, and I *must* deal in subterfuge and treachery if I would win. But you are merely one who sows trouble. You are like the little jackal—the dirty little jackal—who starts a fight between two tigers so that he may fill his mean belly! Don't speak—listen!"

The German's jaw had dropped, but not because words rushed to his lips. He seemed at a loss for them.

"You made me an offer, and I accepted it," continued Ranjoor Singh. "I accepted it on behalf of India. I shall show you in about an hour from now a native regiment —one of the very best native regiments, so mutinous that its officers must lead it out of Delhi to a camp where it will be less dangerous and less likely to corrupt others."

The German nodded. He had asked no more.

"Then, if you fail to fulfil your part," said Ranjoor Singh grimly, "I shall lock

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you in the cellar of this house, where Yasmini keeps her cobras!"

"*Vorwaertz!*" laughed the German, for there was conviction in every word the Sikh had said. "I will show you how a German keeps his bargain!"

"A German?" growled Ranjoor Singh. "A German—Germany is nothing to me! If Germany can pick the bones I leave, what do I care? One does not bargain with a spy, either; one pays his price, and throws him to the cobras if he fail! Come!"

The question of precedence no longer seemed to trouble Ranjoor Singh; he gave the German his back without apology, and as the German followed him down-stairs there came a giggle from behind the curtains.

"Were we overheard?" he asked.

But Ranjoor Singh did not seem to care any more, and did not trouble to answer him.

OUTSIDE the door was a bullock-cart, of the kind in which women make long journeys, with a painted, covered superstructure. The German followed Ranjoor Singh into it, and without any need for orders the Sikh driver began to twist the bullocks' tails and send them along at the pace all India loves. Then Ranjoor Singh began to pay attention to the German's dress, pulling off his expensive turban and replacing that and his clothes with cheaper, dirtier ones.

"Why?" asked the German.

"I will show you why," said Ranjoor Singh.

Then they sat back, each against a side of the cart and squatting native style.

"This regiment that I will show you is mine," said Ranjoor Singh. "I command a squadron of it—or rather did, until I became suspected. Every man in the regiment is mine, and will follow me at a word. When I give the word they will kill their English officers."

Ranjoor Singh leaned his head out of the opening to spit; there seemed something in his mouth that tasted nasty.

"Why did they mutiny?" asked the German.

"Ordered to France!" said Ranjoor Singh with lowered eyes.

For a while there was silence as the cart bumped through the muddy, rutty streets; the only sound that interfered with thought was the driver's voice, apostrophizing the bullocks, and the abuse he poured on them was so time-honored as to be unnoticeable, like the cawing of the city crows.

"It is strange," said the German after a while. Being German, the study of what he did appealed to him nearly as much as the result. "For two years now I have tried to get in touch with the native army, and have used every known expedient, yet I always failed. Here and there I have found a Sepoy who would talk with me, but you are the first officer."

The German was brown-studying, talking almost to himself. He did not see the curse in the Subahdar-major's eyes.

"I have found plenty of merchants who would promise to finance revolt; and plenty of hillmen who would promise anything. But all said, 'We will do what the army does!' And I could not find in all this time, among all those people, anybody to whom I dared show what we—Germany—can do to help. I have seen from the first it was only with the aid of the army that we could accomplish anything, yet the army has been unapproachable. How is it that you have seemed so loyal, all of you, until the minute of war?"

Ranjoor Singh spat again through the opening, with thoroughness and great deliberation. Then he proceeded to give proof that, as Yasmini had said, he was really not a buffalo at all. A fool would have taken chances with any one of a dozen other explanations. Ranjoor Singh, with an expression that faintly suggested Colonel Kirby, picked the right, convincing one.

"The English are not bad people," he said simply. "They have left India better than they found it. They have been unselfish. They have treated us soldiers fairly and honorably. We would not have revolted, had the opportunity not come, but we have long been waiting for the opportunity.

"We are not madmen—we are soldiers. We know the value of mere words. We have kept our plans secret from the merchants and the hillmen, knowing well that they would all follow our lead. If you think that you, or Germany, have persuaded us, you are mistaken. You could not persuade me, or any other true soldier, if you tried for fifty years!

"It is because we had decided on revolt already that I was willing to listen to your

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offer of material assistance. We understand that Germany expects to gain advantage from our revolt, but we cannot help that; that is incidental. As soldiers, we accept what aid we can get from anywhere!"

"So?" said the German.

"*Ja!*" said Ranjoor Singh. "And that is why, if you fail me, I shall give you to Yasmini's cobras that are in need of so much practise!"

"You will admit," said the German, "when I have shown you, that Germany's foresight has been long and shrewd. Your great chance of success, my friend, like Germany's in this war, depends on a sudden, swift, tremendous success at first; the rest will follow as a logical corollary. It is the means for securing that first success that we have been making ready for you for two years and more."

"You should have credit for great secrecy," admitted Ranjoor Singh. "Until a little while ago I had heard nothing of any German plans."

"Russia got the blame for what little was guessed at!" laughed the German.

"Oh!" said Ranjoor Singh.

A LITTLE before midday they reached the Ajmere Gate and the lumbering cart passed under it. At the farther side the driver stopped his oxen without orders, and Ranjoor Singh stepped out, looking quickly up and down the road. There were people about, but none whom he chose to favor with a second glance.

Close by the gate, almost under the shadow of it, and so drab and dirty as to be almost unnoticeable, there was a little cotton-tented booth, with a stock of lemonade and sweetmeats, that did interest him; he looked three times at it, and at the third look a Mohommedan wriggled out of it and walked away without a word.

"Come!" commanded Ranjoor Singh, and the German got out of the cart, looking not so very much unlike the poor Mohammedan who had left the sweetmeat booth.

"Get in there!" commanded Ranjoor Singh, and the German slipped into the real owner's place; so far as appearances went he was a very passable sweetmeat and lemonade seller, and Ranjoor Singh proved competent to guard against contingencies.

He picked a long stick out of the gutter and took his stand beside the booth, frowning as he saw a carriage he suspected to be Yasmini's drive under the gate and come to a stand at the roadside, fifty or sixty yards away.

"May her eyes see so much that it blinds them!" he swore under his breath.

But on second thoughts he ceased to resent her being there, for he argued that the woman who had had brains enough to trick himself would be a useful ally should a pinch come.

"If the officers should recognize me," he growled to the German, though seeming not to talk to him at all, "I should be arrested at once, and shot later. But the men *will* recognize me, and you shall see what you shall see!"

Three small boys came with a piece to spend, but Ranjoor Singh drove them away with his long stick; they argued shrilly from a distance, and one threw a stone at him, but finally they decided he was some new sort of plain-clothes "constabeel" and went away.

One after another, several natives came to make small purchases but, not being boys any longer, a gruff word was enough to send them running. And then came the clatter of the hoofs of the advance guard, and the German looked up to see a fire in Ranjoor Singh's eyes that a caged tiger could not have outdone.

All this while the bullock-cart in which they had come remained in the middle of the road, its driver dozing dreamily on his seat and the bullocks perfectly content to chew the cud. At the sound of the hoofs behind him, the driver suddenly awoke and began to belabor and kick his animals; he seemed oblivious of another cart that came toward him, and of a third that hurried after him from underneath the gate.

In less than sixty seconds all three carts were neatly interlocked, and their respective drivers were engaged in a war of words that beggared Babel.

The advance-guard halted and added words to the torrent. Colonel Kirby caught up the advance-guard and halted too.

"Does he look like a man who commands a loyal regiment?" asked Ranjoor Singh, and the German studied the bowed head and thoughtful angle of a man who at that minute was regretting his good friend the Subahdar-major.

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"You will note that he looks chastened!" The German nodded.

In his own good time Ranjoor Singh ran out and helped with that long stick of his to straighten out the mess; then in thirty seconds the wheels were unlocked again and the carts moving in a hurry to the roadside. The advance-guard moved on, and Kirby followed. Then, troop by troop, the whole of Outram's Own rode by, and the German began to wonder. It seemed to him that the rest of the officers were not demure enough, although he admitted to himself that the enigmatic Eastern faces in the ranks might mean anything at all. He noted that there was almost no talking, and he took that for a good sign—for Germany.

D Squadron came last of all, and convinced him. They rode regretfully, as men who missed their squadron leader, and who, in spite of a message from him, would have better loved to see him riding on their flank.

But Ranjoor Singh stepped out into the road, and the right-end man of the front four recognized him. Not a word was said that the German could hear, but he could see the recognition run from rank to rank and troop to troop, until the squadron knew to a man; he saw them glance at Ranjoor Singh and from him to one another, and ride on with a new stiffening, and a new air of "now, we'll see what comes of it!"

It was as evident, to his practised eye, that they were glad to have seen Ranjoor Singh, and looked forward to seeing him again very shortly, as that they were in a mood for trouble, and he decided to believe the whole of what the Sikh had said on the strength of the obvious truth of part of it.

"Watch now the supply train!" growled Ranjoor Singh, as the wagons began to rumble by.

The German had no means of knowing that the greater part of the regiment's war provisions had gone away by train from a Delhi station. The wagons that followed the regiment on the march were a generous allowance for a regiment going into camp, but not more than that. The spies whose duty it was to watch the railway sidings, reported to somebody else and not to him.

Ranjoor Singh beckoned him after a while, and they came out into the road, to stand between two of the bullock-wagons and gaze after the regiment. The shuttered carriage that Ranjoor Singh had suspected to be Yasmini's, passed them again, and the man beside the driver said something to Ranjoor Singh in an undertone, but the German did not hear it; he was watching the Colonel and another officer talking together beside the road in the distance. The shuttered carriage passed on, but stopped in the shadow of the Gate.

"Look!" said the German. "I thought that officer—the Adjutant, isn't he—recognized you. Now he is pointing you out to the Colonel! Look!"

Ranjoor Singh did look, and he saw that Colonel Kirby was waiting to let the regiment go by. He knew what was passing through Kirby's mind, since it is given to some men, native and English, to have faith in each other. And he knew that there was danger ahead of him through which he might not come with his life, perhaps even with his honor. He would have given, like Kirby, a full year's pay for a handshake then, and have thought the pay well spent.

Kirby began to canter back.

"He has recognized you!" said the German.

"And he is coming to cut me down!" swore Ranjoor Singh.

He dragged the German back behind the nearest cart, and together they ran for the gloom of the big gate, leaving the driver of the bullock-cart standing at gaze where Ranjoor Singh had stood. The door of the shuttered carriage flew open as they reached it, and Ranjoor Singh pushed the German in. He stood a moment longer then, with his foot on the carriage step, watching Colonel Kirby. He watched him question the bullock-cart driver.

"Buffalo!" said a voice then, that he recognized, and he followed into the carriage, shutting the door behind him.

The carriage was off almost before the door slammed.

"AM I to be kept waiting for a week, while a Jat farmer gazes at cattle on the road?" demanded Yasmini, sitting forward out of the darkest corner of the carriage and throwing aside a veil. "He cares nothing for thee!" she whispered. "Didst thou see the jasmine drop into his lap from the Gate? That was mine! Didst thou see him button it into his tunic? So, Ranjoor Singh! That

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for thy Colonel sahib! And his head will smell of *my* musk for a week to come! Aie-ee—what fools men are! Jaldee, jaldee!" she called to the driver through the shutters, and the man whipped up his pair.

It was more than scandalous, to be driving through Delhi streets in a shuttered carriage with a native lady, and even the German's presence scarcely modified the sensation; the German scarcely appreciated the rarity of his privilege, for he was too busy staring through the shutters at a world which tried its best to hide excitement; but Ranjoor Singh was aware all the time of Yasmini's mischievous eyes, and of mirth that held her all but speechless. He knew that she would make up tales about that ride, and would have told them to the half of India to his enduring shame before a year was out.

"Are you satisfied?" she asked the German, after a long silence.

"Of what?" asked the German.

"That Ranjoor Singh sahib can do what he has promised."

The German laughed.

"I have an excuse for doing what I promised," he said, "if that is what you mean."

"That regiment," said Ranjoor Singh, since he had made up his mind to lie thoroughly, "will camp a day's march out of Delhi. The men will wait to hear from me for a day or two, but after that they will mutiny and be done with it; the men are almost out of hand with excitement."

"You mean——"

The German's eyebrows rose, and his light-blue eyes sought Ranjoor Singh's.

"That now is the time to do your part, that I may continue doing mine!"

"What I have to offer would be of no use without the regiment to use it," said the German. "Let the regiment you have just shown me mutiny, and I will lead you and it at once to what I spoke of."

"No," said Ranjoor Singh.

"What then?"

"It does not suit my plan, or my convenience, that there should be any outbreak until I myself have knowledge of all my resources. When everything is in my hand, I will strike hard and fast in my own good time."

"You seem to forget" said the German "that the material aid I offer is from Germany, and that therefore Germany has the right to state the terms. Of course, I know there are the cobras, but I am not afraid of them. The German stipulation is that there shall be at least a show of fight before aid is given. If the cobras deal with me, and my secret dies with me, there will be one German less and that is all. That regiment I have seen looks ripe for mutiny."

Ranjoor Singh drew breath in slowly through set teeth.

"Let it mutiny," said the German, "and I am ready with such material assistance as will place Delhi at its mercy. Delhi is the key to India!"

"It shall mutiny tonight!" said Ranjoor Singh abruptly.

The German stared hard at him, though not so hard as Yasmini; the chief difference was that nobody could have told she was staring, whereas the German gaped.

"It shall mutiny tonight, and you shall be there! You shall lead us then to this material aid you promise, and after that, if it all turns out to be a lie as I suspect, we will talk about cobras."

For a minute—two minutes—three minutes—while the rubber tires bumped along the road toward Yasmini's, the German sat in silence, looking straight in front of him.

"Order horses for him and me!" commanded Ranjoor Singh, and Yasmini bowed obedience.

"When will you start?" the German asked.

"Now! In twenty minutes! We will follow the regiment and reach camp soon after it."

"I must speak first with my colleagues," said the German.

"No!" growled the Sikh.

"My secret information is that several regiments are ordered over sea. Some of them will consent to go, my friend. We will do well to wait until as many regiments as possible are on the water, and then strike hard with the aid of such as have refused to go."

The carriage drew up at Yasmini's front door, and a man jumped off the box-seat to open the carriage door.

"Say the rest inside!" she ordered. "Go into the house! Quickly!"

So the German stepped out first, moving much too spryly for the type of street merchant he was supposed to be.

"Do you mean that?" whispered Yasmini, as she pushed past Ranjoor Singh.

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"Do you mean to ride away with him and stage a mutiny? How can you?"

"She-buffalo!" he answered, with the first low laugh she had heard from him since the game began.

She ran into the house and all the way up the two steep flights of stairs, laughing like a dozen peals of fairy bells.

AT THE head of the stairs she began to sing, for she looked back and saw babu Sita Ram waddling wheezily up-stairs after Ranjoor Singh and the German.

"The gods surely love Yasmini!" she told her maids. "Catch me that babu and bottle him! Drive him into a room where I can speak with him alone!"

"Oh my God, my God!" wailed the babu at the stair-head from amid a maze of women who hustled and shoved him all one way, and that the way he did not want to go. "I must speak with that German gentleman who was giving lecture here—must positivelee give him warning, or all his hopes will be blasted everlastinglee! No—that is room where are cobras—I will not go there!"

In three native languages, one after the other, he pleaded and wailed to no good end; the women were too many for him. He was shoved into a small room as a fat beast is driven into a slaughter-stall, and a door was slammed shut on him. He screamed at an unexpected voice from behind a curtain, and a moment later burst into a sweat from reaction at the sight of Yasmini.

"Listen, babuji," she purred to him.

"Who was that man asking for me?" demanded the German.

"How should I know?" snorted Ranjoor Singh. "Are we to turn aside for every fat babu that asks to speak with us? I have sent for horses."

"I will speak with that man!" said the German.

He began to walk up and down the length of the long room, pushing aside the cushions irritably, and at one end knocking over a great bowl of flowers. He did not appear conscious of his clumsiness, and did not seem to see the maids who ran to mop up the water. At the next turn down the room he pushed between them as if they had not been there. Ranjoor Singh stood watching him, stroking a black beard reflectively, sure that Yasmini would make the next move and willing to wait for it.

"The horses should be here in a few minutes," he said hopefully after a while, for he heard a door open.

Then babu Sita Ram burst in, half running, and holding his great stomach as he always did when in a hurry.

"Oh, my God!" he wailed. "Quick! Where is German gentleman! And not knowing German, how shall I make meaning clear? German should be reckoned among dead languages and— Ah! My God, sir, you astonish me! Resemblance to Mohammedan of no particular standing in community is first class! How shall I——"

"Say it in English!" said the German, blocking his way.

"My God, sahib, it is bad news! How shall I avoid customaree stigma attaching to bearer of ill tidings?"

"Speak!" said the German. "I won't hurt you!"

"Sahib, in pursuit unavailingly of chance emolument in neighborhood of Chandni Chowk just recently ——"

"How recently?" the German asked.

"Oh my God! So recently that there are yet erections of cuticle all down my back! Sahib, not more than twenty minutes have elapsed, and I saw this with my own eyes!"

"Saw what—where?"

"Where? Have I not said where? My God, I am so upset as to be losing sense of all proportion! Where? At German place of business — Siegelman & Meyer — in small street leading out of Chandni Chowk. In search of chance emolument, and finding none yet—finding none yet, sahib—sahib, I am poor man, having wife and familee dependent and also many other disabilitees, including wife's relatives."

The German gave him some paper money impatiently. The babu unfolded it, eyed the denomination with a spasm of relief, folded it again and seemed to stow it into his capacious stomach.

"Sahib, while I was watching, police came up at double-quick march and arrested everybodee, including all Germans in building. There was much annoyance manifested when search did not reveal presence of one other sahib. So I ran to give warning, being veree poor man and without salaried employment."

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"What happened to the Germans?"

"Jail, sahib! All have gone to jail! By this time they are all excommunication, supplied with food and water by authorities. Having once been jail official, I can testify ——"

"What happened to the office?"

"Locked up, sahib! Big red seal—much sealing wax, and stamp of police department, with notice regarding penalty for breaking same, and also police sentry at door!"

Looking more unlike a Mohammedan street-vender than ever, the German began to pace the room again with truly martial strides, frowning as he sought through the recesses of his mind for the correct solution of the problem.

"Listen!" he said, coming to a stand in front of Ranjoor Singh. "I have changed my mind!"

"The horses are ready," answered Ranjoor Singh.

"The German Government has been to huge expense to provide aid of the right kind, to be ready at the right minute. My sole business is to see that the utmost use is made of it."

"So is mine!" vowed Ranjoor Singh.

"You have heard that the police are after me?"

Ranjoor Singh nodded.

"Can you get away from here unseen—unknown to the police?"

Ranjoor Singh nodded again, for he was very sure of Yasmini's resource.

Again the German began to pace the room, now with his hands behind him, now with folded arms—now with his chin down to his breast, and now with a high chin as he seemed on the verge of reaching some determination. And then Yasmini began to loose the flood of her resources, that Ranjoor Singh might make use of what he chose; she was satisfied to leave the German in the Sikh's hands and to squander aid at random.

MEN began to come in, one at a time. They would whisper to Ranjoor Singh, and hurry out again. Some of them would whisper to Yasmini over in the window, and she would give them mock messages to carry, very seriously. Babu Sita Ram was stirred out of a meditative coma and sent hurrying away, to come back after a little while and wring his hands. He ran over to Yasmini.

"It is awful!" he wailed. "Soon there will be no troops left with which to quell Mohommedan uprising. All loyal troops are leaving, and none but disloyal men are left behind. The Government is mad, and I am veree much afraid!"

Yasmini quieted him, and Ranjoor Singh, pretending to be busy with other messengers, noted the effect of the babu's wail on the German. He judged the "change of mind" had gone far enough.

"We should lose time by following my regiment," he said at last. "There are now five more regiments ready to mutiny and they will come to me to wherever I send for them."

The German's blue eyes gazed into the Sikh's brown ones very shrewdly and very long. His hand sought the neighborhood of his hip and dwelt there a moment longer than the Sikh thought necessary.

"I have decided we must hurry," he said, "I will show you what I have to show. I will not be taking chances. You must bring a messenger, and he must go for your mutineers while you stay there with me. When we are there, you will be in my power until the regiments come; and when they come I will surrender to you. Do you agree?"

"Yes," said Ranjoor Singh.

"Then choose your messenger. Choose a man who will not try to play tricks—a man who will not warn the authorities; because if there is any slip, any trickery, I will undo in one second all that has been done!"

So Ranjoor Singh conferred with Yasmini, over between the two great bowls of flowers that stand in her big window; and she suppressed a squeal of excitement while she watched the German resume his pacing up and down.

"Take Sita Ram!" she advised.

Ranjoor Singh scowled at the babu.

"That fat bellyful of fear?" he growled. "I would rather take a pig!"

"All the same, take Sita Ram!" she advised.

So the babu was roused again out of a comfortable snooze, and Yasmini whispered to him something that frightened him so much that he trembled like a man with palsy.

"I am married man with children!" he expostulated.

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"I will be kind to your widow!" purred Yasmini.

"I will not go!" vowed the babu.

"Put him in the cobra room!" she commanded, and some maids came closer to obey.

"I will go!" said Sita Ram. "But oh, my God, a man should receive pecuniary recompense far greater than legendary ransom! I shall not come back alive! I know I shall not come back alive!"

"Who cares, babuji?" asked Yasmini.

"True!" said Sita Ram. "This is land of devil-take-hindmost, and with my big stomach I am often last. I am veree full of fear!"

"We shall need food," interposed the German. "Water will be there, but we had better have food with us for two nights."

Yasmini gave a sharp order, and several of her maids ran out of the room. Ten minutes later they returned with three baskets and gave one each to the German, to Ranjoor Singh, and to Sita Ram. Sita Ram opened his and peered in. The German opened his, looked pleased and closed the lid again. Ranjoor Singh accepted his at its face value, and did not open it.

"May the memsahib never lack plenty from which to give!" said Ranjoor Singh, for there is no word for "Thank you" in all India.

"I will bless the memsahib at each mouthful!" said Sita Ram.

"Truly a bellyful of blessings!" laughed Yasmini.

Then they all went to the stairhead and watched and listened through the open door while a closed carriage was driven away in a great hurry. Three maids and six men came up-stairs, one after another at intervals, to report the road all clear; the first carriage had not been followed, and there was nobody watching; another carriage waited. Babu Sita Ram was sent down-stairs to get into the waiting carriage and stay there on the lookout.

"Now, bring him better clothes!" said Ranjoor Singh.

But Yasmini had anticipated that order.

"They are in the carriage, on the seat," she said.

So the German went down-stairs and climbed in beside the babu, changing his turban at once for the better one that he found waiting in there.

"This performance is worth a rajah's ransom!" grumbled Babu Sita Ram. "Will sahib not put elbow in my belly, seeing same is highly sensitive?"

But the German laughed at him.

"Love is rare, non-contagious sickness!" asserted Sita Ram with conviction.

At the head of the stairs Ranjoor Singh and Yasmini stood looking into each other's eyes. He looked into pools of laughter and mystery, that told him nothing at all; she saw a man's heart, glowing in his brown ones.

"It will be for you now," said Ranjoor Singh, "to act with speed and all discretion. I don't know what we are going to see, although I know it is artillery of some sort. I am sure he has a plan for destroying every trace of whatever it is, and of himself and me, if he suspects treachery. I know no more. I can only go ahead."

"And trust me!" said Yasmini.

The Sikh did not answer.

"And trust me!" repeated Yasmini. "I will save you out of this, Ranjoor Singh sahib, that we may fight our quarrel to a finish later on. What would the world be without enemies? You will not find artillery!"

"How do you know?"

"I have known for nearly two years what you will find there, my friend! Only I have not known exactly where to find it. And yet, sometimes I have thought that I have known that too! Go, Ranjoor Singh. You will be in danger. Above all, do not try to force that German's hand too far until I come with aid. It is better to talk than fight, so long as the enemy is strongest!"

"Woman!" swore Ranjoor Singh so savagely that she laughed straight into his face. "If you suspect—if you can guess where we are going—send men to surround the place and watch!"

"Will a tiger walk into a watched lair?" asked Yasmini. "Go, talker! Go and do things!"

So, swearing and dissatisfied, Ranjoor Singh went down and climbed on to the box-seat of a two-horse carriage.

"Which way?" he asked, and the German growled an answer through the shutters.

"Now, straight on!" said the German, after fifteen minutes. "Straight on out of Delhi!"

They were headed south, and driving very slowly, for to have driven fast would

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have been to draw attention to themselves. Ranjoor Singh scarcely troubled to look about him, and Sita Ram fell into a doze, in spite of his protestations of fear. The German was the only one of the party who was at pains to keep a lookout, and he was most exercised to know whether they were followed; over and over again he called on Ranjoor Singh to stop until a following carriage should overtake them and pass on.

So they were a very long time driving to Old Delhi, where the ruins of old cities stand piled against one another in a tangled mass of verdure that is hardly penetrable except where the tracks wind in and out. The shadow of the Kutb Minar was long when they drove past it, and it was dusk when the German shouted and Ranjoor Singh turned the horses in between two age-old trees and drew rein at a shattered temple door.

Some monkeys loped away, chattering, and about a thousand parakeets flew off, shrilling, for another roost. But there was no other sign of life.

"STABLE the horses in here!" said the German, and they did so, Ranjoor Singh dipping water out of a rain-pool and filling a stone trough that had once done duty as receptacle for gifts for a long-forgotten god. Then they pushed the carriage under a tangle of hanging branches.

"Look about you!" advised the German, as he emptied food for the horses on the temple floor, and Babu Sita Ram made very careful note of the temple bearings, while Ranjoor Singh and the German blocked the old doorway with whatever they could find to keep night-prowlers outside and the horses in.

Then the German led the way into the dark, swinging a lantern that he had unearthed from some recess. Babu Sita Ram walked second, complaining audibly and shuddering at every shadow. Last came Ranjoor Singh, grim, silent. And the rain beat down on all three of them until they were drenched and numb, and their feet squelched in mud at every step.

For all the darkness, Ranjoor Singh made note of the fact that they were following a wagon track, into which the wheels of a native cart had sunk deep, times without number. Only native ox-carts leave a track like that.

It must have been nine o'clock, and the babu was giving signs of nearly complete exhaustion, when they passed beyond a ring of trees into a clearing. They stood at the edge of the clearing in a shadow for about ten minutes, while the German watched catwise for signs of life.

"It is now," he said, tapping Ranjoor Singh's chest, "that you begin to be at my mercy. I assure you that the least disobedience on your part will mean your instant death!"

"Lead on!" growled Ranjoor Singh.

"Do you recognize the place?"

Ranjoor Singh peered through the rain in every direction. At each corner of the clearing, north, south, east and west, he could dimly see some sort of ruined arch; and there was another ruin in the center.

"No," he said.

"This is the oldest temple ruin anywhere near Delhi. On some inscriptions it is called "Temple of the Four Winds," but the old Hindu who lived in it before we bribed him to go away called it the "Winds of the World." It is known as "Winds of the World" on the books of the German War Office. I think it is really of Greek origin myself, but I am not an Orientalist, and the text-books all say I am wrong."

"Lead on!" said Ranjoor Singh, and the German led them, swinging his lantern and seeming not at all afraid of being seen now.

"We have taken steps quite often to make the people hereabouts believe this temple haunted!" he said. "They avoid it at night as if the devil lived here. If any of them see my lantern they will not stop running till they reach the sea!"

They came to a ruin that was such an utter ruin that it looked as if an earthquake must have shaken a temple to pieces to be disintegrated by the weather; but Ranjoor Singh noticed that the cart-tracks wound around the side of it, and when they came to a teak trap-door of quite considerable size, half-hidden by creepers, he was not much surprised.

"My God, gentlemen!" said Sita Ram. "That place is wet-weather refuge for many million cobras! If I must die, I will prefer to perish in rain where wife and family may find me for proper funeral rites. I will not go in there!"

But the German raised the trap-door, and Ranjoor Singh took the unhappy babu by the scruff of his fat neck.

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"In with you!" he ordered.

And chattering as if his teeth were castanets, the babu trod gingerly down damp stone steps whose center had been worn into ruts by countless feet. The German came last, and let the trap slam shut.

"My God!" yelled the babu. "Let me go! I am family man!"

"*Vorwaerts!*" laughed the German, leading the way toward a teak door set in a stone wall.

They were in an ancient temple vault that seemed to have miraculously escaped from the destruction that had whelmed the whole upper part. Not a stone of it was out of place. It was wind and watertight, and the vaulted roof, that above was nothing better than a mound of debris, from below looked nearly as perfect as when the stones had first been fitted into place.

The German produced a long key, opened the teak door and stood aside to let them pass.

"No, no!" shuddered Sita Ram; but Ranjoor Singh pushed him through; the German followed, and the door slammed shut as the trap had done.

"And now, my friends, I will convince you!" said the German, holding the lantern high. "What are those?"

THE light from the solitary lantern fell on rows and rows of bales, arranged in neat straight lines, until away in the distance it suggested endless other shadowy bales, whose outlines could be little more than guessed at. They were in a vault so huge that Ranjoor Singh did not even attempt to estimate its size.

"See this!" said the German, walking close to something on a wooden stand, and he held the light above it. "In the office in Delhi that the police have just sealed up there is a wireless apparatus very much like this. This, that you see here, is a detonator. This is fulminate of mercury. This is dynamite. With a touch of a certain key in Delhi we could have blown up this vault at any minute of the past two years, if we had thought it necessary to hide our tracks. A shot from this pistol would have much the same effect," he added darkly.

"But the bales?" asked Ranjoor Singh. "What is in the bales?"

"Dynamite bombs, my friend! You native soldiers have no artillery, and we have seen from the first the necessity of supplying a substitute. By making full use of the element of surprise, these bombs should serve your purpose. There are one million of them, packed two hundred in a bale—much more useful than artillery in the hands of untrained men!

"Those look like bales of blankets. They are. Cotton blankets from Muenchen-Gladbach. Only, the middle blankets have been omitted, and the outer ones have served as a cushion to prevent accidental discharge. They have been imported in small lots at a time, and brought here four or five at a time in ox-carts from one or other of the Delhi railway stations by men who are no longer in this part of India. They have been pensioned off."

"How did you get them through the customs?" wondered Ranjoor Singh.

"Did you ever see a rabbit go into his hole?" the German asked. "They were very small consignments, obviously of blankets. The duty was paid without demur, and the price paid the customs men was worth their while. That part was easy!"

"Of what size are the bombs?" asked Ranjoor Singh.

"About the size of an orange. Come, I'll show you."

He led him to an opened bale, and showed him two hundred of the devilish contrivances, all nestling like the eggs of some big bird.

"My God!" moaned Sita Ram. "Are those dynamite? Sahibs—snakes are better! Snakes can feel afraid, but those—ow! Let me go away!"

"Let him go," said the German. "Let him take his message."

"Go, then!" ordered Ranjoor Singh, and the German walked to the door to let him out.

"What is your message?" he asked.

"To Yasmini first, for she is in touch with all of them," said Sita Ram. "First I will go to Yasmini. Then she will come here to say that the regiments have started. First she will come alone; after her the regiments."

"She had better be alone!" said the German. "Go on, run! And don't forget the way back. Wait! How will she know the way? How will you describe it to her?"

"She? Describe it to her? I will tell her 'The Winds of the World,' and she will come straight."

"How? How will she know?"

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"The priest who used to be here—whom you bribed to go away—he is her night doorkeeper now!" said Sita Ram. "Yes, she will come veree quickly!"

The German let him out with an air mixed of surprise and disbelief, and returned to Ranjoor Singh with far less iron in his stride, though with no less determination.

"Now, we shall see!" he said, drawing an automatic pistol and cocking it carefully. "This is not meant as a personal threat to you, so long as we two are in here alone. It's in case of trickery from outside. I shall blow this place sky-high if anything goes wrong. If the regiments come, good! You shall have the bombs. If they don't come, or if there's a trick played—click! Good-by! We'll argue the rest in Heaven!"

"Very well," said Ranjoor Singh; and to show how little he felt concerned he drew his basket to him and began to eat.

The German followed suit. Then Ranjoor Singh took most of his wet clothes off and spread them up on the bales to dry. The German imitated that too.

"Go to sleep if you care to," said the German. "I shall stand watch," he added with a dry laugh.

But if a Sikh soldier cannot manage without sleep, there is nobody on earth who can. Ranjoor Singh sat back against a bale, and the watch resolved itself into a contest of endurance, with the end by no means in sight.

"How long should it take that man to reach her?" asked the German.

"Who knows?" the Sikh answered. "Perhaps three hours, perhaps a week! She is never still, and there are those five regiments to hold in readiness."

"She is a wonderful woman," said the German.

Ranjoor Singh grunted.

"How is it that she has known of this place all this time, and yet has never tried to meddle with us?"

"I, too, am anxious to know that!" said Ranjoor Singh.

"You are surly, my friend! You do not like this pistol? You take it as an insult? Is that it?"

"I am thinking of those regiments, and of these grenades, and of what I mean to do," said Ranjoor Singh.

"Let us talk it over."

"No."

"Please yourself!"

They sat facing each other for hour after dreary hour, leaning back against bales and thinking each his own thoughts. After about four hours of it, it occurred to the German to dismantle the wireless detonator.

"We would have been blown up if the police had grown inquisitive," he said with a shrug of his shoulders, returning to his seat.

After that they sat still for four more hours, and then put their clothes on, not that they were dry yet, but the German had grown tired of comparing Ranjoor Singh's better physique with his own. He put his clothes on to hide inferiority, and Ranjoor Singh followed suit for the sake of manners.

"What rank do you hold in your army at home?" asked Ranjoor Singh, after an almost endless interval.

"If I told you that, my friend, you would be surprised."

"I think not," said Ranjoor Singh. "I think you are an officer who was dismissed from the service."

"What makes you think so?"

"I am sure of it!"

"What makes you sure?"

"You are too well educated for a non-commissioned officer. If you had not been dismissed the service, you would be on the fighting strength, or else in the reserve and ready for the front in Europe. And what army keeps spies of your type on its strength? Am I right?"

BUT then came Yasmini, carrying her food basket as the rest had done. She knocked at the outer trap-door, and the German ran to peep through a hidden window at her. Then he went up a partly ruined stair and looked all around the clearing through gaps in the debris overhead, that had been glazed for protection's sake. Then he admitted her.

She ran in past him, ran past him again when he opened the second door, and laughed at Ranjoor Singh. She seemed jubilant and very little interested in the bombs that the German was at pains to explain to her. She had to tell of five regiments on the way.

"The first will be here in two or three hours," she asserted; "your men, Ranjoor Singh—your Jat Sikhs that are ever first to mutiny!"

She squealed delight as the Sikh's face flushed at the insult.

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"What is the cocked pistol for?" she asked the German.

He told her, but she did not seem frightened in the least. She began to sing, and her voice echoed strangely through the vault, until she herself seemed to grow hypnotized by it and she began to sway, pushing her basket away from her behind a bale near where the German sat.

"I will dance for you!" she said suddenly.

She arose and produced a little wind instrument from among her clothing—a little bell-mouthed wooden thing, with a voice like Scots bagpipes.

"Out of the way, Ranjoor Singh!" she ordered. "Sit yonder. I will dance between you, so that the German sahib may watch both of us at once!"

So Ranjoor Singh went back twenty feet away, wondering at her mood, and wondering even more what trick she meant to play. He had reached the conclusion, very reluctantly, that presently the German would fire that pistol of his and end the careers of all three of them; so he was thinking of the squadron, on its way to France. In a way he was sorry for Yasmini; but it was the squadron and Colonel Kirby that drew at his heart-strings.

Swaying to and fro, from the waist upward, Yasmini began to play her little instrument. The echoing vault became a solid sea of throbbing noise, and as she played she increased her speed of movement, until the German sat and gaped. He had seen her dance on many more than one occasion. So had Ranjoor Singh. Never had either of them, or any living man, seen Yasmini dance as she did that night.

She was a storm. Her instrument was but an added touch of artistry to heighten the suggestion. From a slow, rhythmic swing she went by gusts and fits and starts to the wildest, utterly abandoned fury of a hurricane, sweeping a wide circle with her gauzy dress, and at the height of each elemental climax, in mid-whirl of some new amazing figure, she would set her instrument to screaming, until the German shouted "Bravo!" and Ranjoor Singh nodded grave approval.

"KREUTZ-BLITZEN!" swore the German suddenly, leaping to his feet and staggering.

And Yasmini pounced on him. Ranjoor Singh could not see what had happened, but he sprang to his feet and ran toward them. But before he could reach them Yasmini had snatched the German's pistol and tossed it to him, standing back from the writhing German, panting, with blazing eyes, and looking too lovely to be human. She did not speak. She looked.

And Ranjoor Singh looked too. Under the writhing German, and back again over him there crawled a six-foot hooded cobra, seeming to caress the carcass of his prey.

"He will be dead in five—ten minutes," said Yasmini, "and then I will catch my snake again! If you want to ask him questions you had better hurry!"

Then Ranjoor Singh recalled the offices that men had done for him when he was wounded. He asked the German if he might send messages, and to whom. But the dying man seemed to be speechless, and only writhed. It was nearly a minute before Ranjoor Singh divined his purpose, and pounced on the hand that lay underneath him. He wrenched away another pistol only just in time. The snake crawled away, and Yasmini coaxed it back into its basket.

"Now," she said, "when he is dead we will drive back to Delhi and amuse ourselves! You shall run away to fight men you never quarreled with, and I will govern India! Is that not so?"

Ranjoor Singh did not answer her. He kept trying again and again to get some message from the German, to send to some friend in Germany. But the man died speechless, and Ranjoor Singh could find no scrap of paper on him, or no mark that would give any clue to his identity.

"Come!" said Yasmini. "Lock the door on him, now that he is dead. We will tell the General-sahib, and the General-sahib will send some to bury him. Come!"

"Not yet," said Ranjoor Singh. "Speak. When did you first know that these Germans had taken this vault to use?"

"More than two years ago," she boasted, "when the old priest, that was no priest at all, came to me to be doorkeeper."

"And when did you know that they were storing dynamite in here?"

"I did not know."

"Then, blankets?"

"Bah! Two years ago, when a customs clerk with too much money began to make love to a maid of mine."

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"Then, why did you not warn the Government at once, and so save all this trouble?"

"Buffalo! Much fun that would have been! Ranjoor Singh, thy Jat imagination does thee justice. Come, come and chase that regiment of thine, and spill those stupid brains in France! Lock the door and come away!"

XIV

Brother, a favor I came to crave,
Oh, more than brother, oh, more than friend!
Spare me a half o' thy soldier grave,
That I sleep with thee at the end!
Spur to spur, and knee to knee,
Brother, I'll ride to death with thee!

THE crew of the Messagerie Maritime steamship *Duc d'Orleans* will tell of a tall Sikh officer with many medals on his breast, who boarded their ship in Bombay with letters to the Captain from a British officer of such high rank as to procure him instant accession to his request. Bound homeward from Singapore, the *Duc d'Orleans* had put into Bombay for coal, supplies and orders. She left with orders for Marseilles, and on board of her there went this same Sikh officer, who, it seemed, had missed the transport on which his regiment had sailed.

He had with him a huge, ill-mannered charger, and one Sikh trooper by way of servant. The charger tried to eat all that came near him, including his horse-box, the ship's crew, and enough hay for at least two ordinary horses. But Ranjoor Singh, who said very little to anybody about anything, had a certain way with him, and men put up with the charger's delinquencies for its owner's sake.

When they reached the Red Sea and the ship rolled less, Ranjoor Singh and his trooper went to most extraordinary lengths to keep the charger in condition. They took him out of his box and walked him around the decks for hours at a time, taking turns at it until officer, trooper and horse were tired out.

They did the same all down the Mediterranean. And when they landed at Marseilles the horse was fit, as he proved to his own brute satisfaction by trying to kick the life out of a gendarme on the quay.

Another letter from somebody very high in authority to a French general officer in Marseilles procured the instant supply of a horse for the Sikh trooper and two passes on a northbound train. The evening of their landing saw them on their way to the front, Ranjoor Singh in a first-class compartment, and his man in the horse-box. Neither knew any French to speak of, but the French were very kind to these dark-skinned gentlemen who were in so much hurry to help them win their war.

IT WAS dark—nearly pitch-dark at the journey's end. The moon shone now and then through banks of black clouds and showed long lines of poplar trees. Beyond, in the distance, there was a zone in which great flashes leaped and died—great savage streaks of fire of many colors—and a thundering that did not cease at all.

Along the road that ran between the poplars two men sent their horses at a rousing clip, though not so fast as to tax them to the utmost. The man in front rode a brute that lacked little of seventeen hands, and that fought for the bit as if he would like to eat the far horizon.

In the very, very dark zone, on the near side of where the splashes of red fire fell, jingling bits and a kick now and then proclaimed the presence of a regiment of cavalry. Nothing else betrayed them, until one was near enough to see the whites of men's eyes in the dark, for they were native Indian cavalry who know the last master-touches of the art of being still.

Between them and the very, very dark zone—which was what the Frenchmen call a forest, and some other nations call a stand of timber—a little group of officers sat talking in low tones, eight Englishmen and the others Sikhs.

"They say they're working 'round the edge—say they can't hold 'em. It looks very much as if we're going to get our chance tonight. When a red light flashes three times at this near corner of the woods, we're to ride into 'em in line—it'll mean that our chaps are falling back in a hurry, leaving lots of room between 'em and the wood for us to ride through. Better join your men, you fellows! O Lord! What wouldn't Ranjoor Singh have given to be here! What's that?"

There came a challenge from the rear. Two horsemen cantered up.

"Who are you? What d'you want?"

"Sahib! Colonel Kirby sahib!"

"What is it? Hello—there are the three

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lights—no, two lights—that's 'Get ready!' Who are you? Why—Ranjoor Singh!"

"Salaam, sahib!"

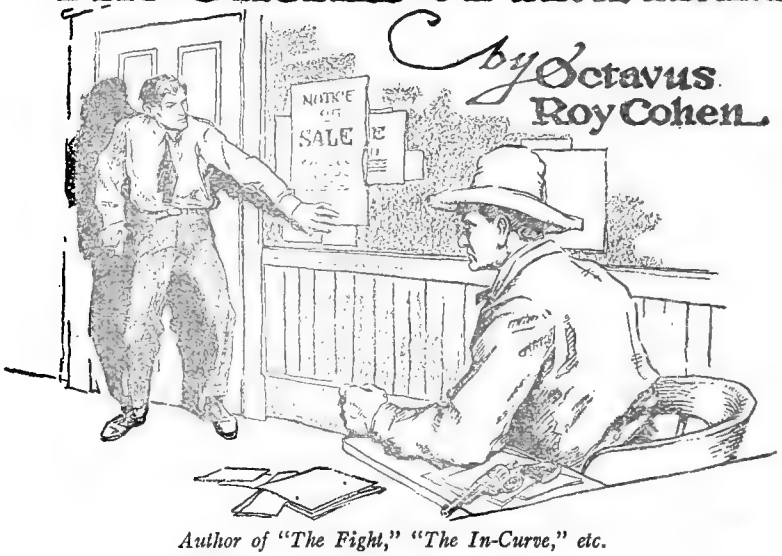
"Shake hands. By Gad—I'm glad! Find your squadron, Ranjoor Singh—find it at once, man—you're just in time. There go the three lights! *Outram's Own!—in line of squadron columns to the right—Trot, March! Right!*"

Ranjoor Singh had kept the word of Babu Sita Ram, and had managed to be with them when the first blood ran.

THE END

The Sheriff Of Karnak

by Octavus Roy Cohen



Author of "The Fight," "The In-Curve," etc.

THE midsummer sun baked blisteringly down on the quadrangle of the little South Carolina county seat, around which were ranged, like a hollow square of soldiers facing inward, the court-house, the county jail, the town lockup, the half dozen general stores, the dilapidated drug store and the three law offices which evidenced the business potentialities of Karnak.

The white, sand-clay road which stretched away in both directions from the front of the red-brick, prison-like court-house seemed to writhe like a huge snake under the withering glare, and the heat waves danced exultingly. The effect of the heat was intensified by a deadly quiet, as if all creatures in the vicinity had been stricken.

In a near-by field stood a plow; the mule and plowboy were nowhere to be seen. In the pine-fenced yard of the court-house two ramshackle buggies stood empty-shafted. The tin roof over the second story of the rambling building seemed fairly to pulsate with the heat, and the bricks radiated as if twinkling back and forth, up and down.

With one exception, the offices were empty. The sheriff, hale and hearty, and uncomfortably sleeping, lay back in his swivel chair and rested his huge feet on the ledge of his old roll-top desk, while the floor near by was strewn with warrants and attachments which had been kicked from their proper places during his daily siesta. He snored loudly and his big body twitched occasionally as swarms of humming gnats alighted on the exposed skin of his neck, face and arms.

THE sheriff—"Ol' Dave Potter," he was affectionately called, although he was barely past forty—was an institution in the county. Term after term he had been reelected without opposition. Every Democratic voter was a constituent.

He was trusted and beloved by all. His official hand was of iron, and his oath of

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office was, to him, the decalogue. He belonged to one of the oldest and most aristocratic families of the aristocratic county, and no man in his family had known fear.

His father had worn the butternut of the Confederacy, and had returned after Appomattox with a brilliant record and an empty sleeve. Those who knew him best said proudly that the sheriff was a chip of the old block, and more than once he had proved his fearlessness. With Dave Potter as sheriff the residents of the county felt safe, and, being typically of the Old South, did not care particularly about experimenting with a new man. So the county political fights were waged about all the offices save that of sheriff.

Potter slept on in his desk-chair, thin streams of perspiration trickling their tortuous ways down his ruddy cheeks. His lips were twisted into their habitual half-smile; his right hand rested unconsciously on the butt of a revolver which lay on the desk, doing duty as a paper-weight.

There was a sound of steps. The sleeper stirred uneasily. He opened his eyes and listened lazily. The steps were plainer now, making a peculiar sound as they padded crunchingly and rapidly on the shell walk leading to the front door of the court-house. Somebody running on this hot day? The sheriff lowered his feet, rubbed his eyes with a ponderous, knotty hand, and waited.

Into the court-house dashed a man, his steps flying down the hallway. He reached the sheriff's office and entered impetuously. Then he whirled, slammed the door and shot the bolt. The sheriff had risen. He faced a young man with disheveled hair and wild eyes, a man whose breast was heaving from the effects of the long run through the white, sandy road. The newcomer straightened, his back hard against the door, eyes shining with excitement, long, strong, sensitive fingers opening and closing in an excess of nervousness. The sheriff spoke.

"What's the matter, son?"

The man at the door gazed appealingly at his father.

"S'down, dad. Lemme get some water."

He walked nervously across the room, drained two glasses of the tepid artesian water which stood in a cracked pitcher on the dusty sill, walked swiftly back to the door and resumed his defensive attitude.

Father and son eyed each other unwaveringly. The droning swarm of gnats buzzed about the young man's head with an irritating monotone of sound. There was no vestige of a breeze; the world seemed to have been petrified. Then the sheriff broke the silence.

"Son, what's the matter?"

The boy—scarcely past his majority—continued his silent, searching scrutiny, as if to find encouragement. The sheriff's eyes did not waver, nor did he move a muscle. The younger man fidgeted, squirmed slightly under the searching glance. Then his fists clenched, his shoulders went back and the Potter directness asserted itself.

"I — killed — Jim Barfield — at the Grove—half-hour ago!"

He panted like a spent runner, relieved that the confession had at last been made.

Except for a clenching of one fist and an involuntary flicker of the eyelids, the sheriff showed no emotion. He continued to stare evenly at his son.

"Why did you do it? How?"

"He had been drinking, dad. He asked me into the old Means shack at the side of the Grove under those live oaks. I went in, we chatted awhile, an' he offered me a drink. I refused. He cursed me—called me a——"

"Never mind what he called you. Go on."

"I knocked him down. When he got up he had his revolver in his hand. I grabbed him before he could shoot and took the gun away."

The older man gasped as if in pain; the strain had been broken. It was a gasp of relief.

"If you shot him then it was self-defense," he interjected eagerly, hopefully.

"But I didn't shoot him—then," the boy admitted fearfully. "That's the worst of it. Jim had started, reeling, to leave the place. At the door he turned, sneered, called me a——"

The boy's face paled and he clenched his fists until the knuckles showed dead white. He opened his palms with a hopeless gesture of abandon.

"I couldn't help it, dad. I was like a wild man; I had the revolver in my hand and before I could think of what I was doing I had fired. He went down—it was awful!"

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"Who saw you?"

The voice was sharp but wistful as the sheriff leaned anxiously forward.

"No one. I dashed through the door at the other side of the shack and got away into the woods. It must have been fully ten minutes before any one knew where the shot came from. The picnickers were all near the creek eating lunch when it happened."

"Why did you run?"

"I—I couldn't help it, dad. I knew it was—murder! I knew I hadn't shot in self-defense. I knew that Jim Barfield was popular. I was afraid, dad—afraid!"

"Did anybody see you go into the shack with him?"

"No, sir, I am certain no one saw us."

"Were you with——"

The telephone bell rang madly—three long rings and one short one, after the manner of the country telephone systems—and the sheriff turned irritably to answer, his mind whirling with the import of what he had just heard. His voice was curt.

"'Lo!"

"Hello, is this you, Sheriff Potter?"

The voice at the other end quavered with excitement.

"Yes!"

"This is Tommy Ravenel. I'm down here at the Grove. "There's been a murder here——"

"Murder!"

The sheriff's muscular hand tightened spasmodically on the receiver. At the sound of the ugly word the younger man paled and held to the door-knob for support. He felt weak, nauseated.

"Yes. Murder!"

Ravenel was talking fast.

"Barfield's son, Jim, was shot by a negro in the old Means shack——"

Potter flamed—

"A negro?"

He passed his hand across his fevered forehead.

"Did you say a negro?"

The guilty man at the door trembled and wondered, his brain racked by doubt, a vague hope springing from the half-heard conversation.

"Yes; Jenkins's negro, Sam Tarbee. That's why I called you. The boys have got him, an' they're taking him to the other end of the Grove, up yonder by the swimming-hole, to lynch him."

THE sheriff slammed the receiver on the hook and faced his son.

"They're about to lynch Sam Tarbee, Jenkins's negro, for killing Jim Barfield. The mob's carrying him up to the end of the Grove near the swimming-hole. I'm going to stop them."

He slipped the revolver into a hip-pocket, and the boy clutched his arm.

"Goin' to save the negro?" he faltered. "Why, dad! What'll *I* do?"

"I don't know." The answer was gruff. "But I do know I'm sheriff of this here county, and I'm not going to let that mob lynch an innocent man."

"It means me or the negro, dad. Which shall it be? No jury in the world would acquit me. What are you going to do?"

The father paused, gazed upon his son with affection and shame struggling for mastery, and then, like a man in a trance, pushed him aside and opened the door.

"I'll talk about your case later," he said, looking backward, but not into the boy's pleading eyes. "Right now I'm going to do my duty—alone if necessary. That negro ain't going to swing!"

As the sound of his heavy, hurried footsteps floated back, the son sank into the old, battered desk-chair, his face ashen, and dropped his head upon the table before him.

Then he rose unsteadily to his feet, teeth clenched and hands twitching.

"Heaven!" he muttered. "Dad's gone down there—alone. He'll need help! I'm going!"

And he, too, strode through the door, trotting heavily after his father, bound on the same errand.

II

IN THE Grove the tragedy of the South was about to be enacted. The baked dust of the roadway was stirred by the procession of Death, as it wended its way through the shimmering heat waves.

The low, muttered oaths of the lynchers were punctuated by the piteous moaning and shrill protestations of innocence of the wretch who dragged behind at the end of a long rope. His few garments were almost torn from his back, as from time to time he sprawled along in the road, jerked from his

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feet by the self-appointed executioners in spasmodic fits of frenzy, as they dragged him pitilessly on his last earthly journey.

The men said little. Their suppressed fury was too deep for words. Nor did they heed the condemned negro on whose death they were bent. His protestations of innocence fell on deaf ears. Was it not natural for him to lie when lying might save his life? And had they not captured him while he was running from the shack in which Jim Barfield had been so foully slain?

There was no voice of protest in the crowd. The mob was quiet; the proceedings were as terrible as if a court were in session. It was the ominous quiet which finally caused the negro to subside into a low, crooning death-chant—that weird, mournful, tuneless wail of the negro when facing death. The face had lost some of its terror, but the large eyes still held that pleading, hunted look. As the small roots and ruts in the road bruised the flesh of the doomed wretch, he attempted to clamber to his feet. One of the men misinterpreted his action and kicked him brutally.

"None of your tricks, you murderer!" he rasped. "We've got you now and we're goin' to keep you for a few minutes."

The others of the mob scarcely noticed the incident. It was the speedy death of the negro they desired, and a few kicks more or less were of no moment. On and on they went, their set, tense faces bespeaking iron determination. The idea that their victim might be free of guilt did not enter their minds.

The famous Swamp Fox live oak in the Grove was reached; under it the peerless General Marion had encamped while engaged in harassing the hirelings of King George, back in the days of 1776. It afforded no surprise that the noose had already been knotted. The victim had been raised to his feet and was covered by revolvers while the free end of the rope was tossed across the limb nearest the ground.

A farmer, whose place the death procession had passed on its way to the place of execution, dashed up on horseback.

"You boys'd better hurry," he cautioned breathlessly. "She'iff Potter is on the way here. Len Williams just met me at the forks yonder and gave me the news. You'll have to finish in a hurry or move some'ares else. She'iff Potter don't stand for lynchin's—you know."

The leaders called a speedy conference. They decided on immediate action. The doomed wretch heard, and taking advantage of the diversion and the relaxation of vigilance on the part of his guard during the brief conference, made a last desperate fight for life. He was caught before he had gone ten feet, the rope was thrown about his neck and twelve strong arms jerked him from the earth.

Far down the road a figure could be seen approaching at a ponderous run, his feet kicking up steady little dust clouds as he plodded wearily and indefatigably on. Closer and closer he came, and, with revolver in hand, and the perspiration streaming from his face and falling in small rivulets on his heaving shirt-bosom, the sheriff of Karnak dashed into the crowd.

"BACK, every one of you! I'll shoot the man who don't let loose that rope right off!"

He leaped forward by sheer strength, jerked the rope from the hands of the would be executioners, and the negro fell, a gibbering mass of quivering flesh, into the hot roadway, where he crawled snake-like to the feet of his savior. He lay there, frothing his thanks and digging his fingers deep into the dust while his staring, hunted eyes roved from one face to the other, and invariably back to the sheriff.

Young Dave Potter came running up, collar off and shirt opened at the throat, disclosing a heaving, sweat-streaked chest. The sheriff looked around, recognized his son, and a grim smile of welcome, of pride, of pleasure, flickered about his set lips.

"Thanks, son!" he said simply. "You're a *man!*"

The boy flushed and took his place by the sheriff's side.

"You're hasty, boys," chided Potter. "This negro never killed Jim Barfield."

"That's a lie!"

The voice in the crowd was clear and firm, and the son involuntarily started forward, but was restrained by a look from his father.

"The man who said that," said the sheriff clearly, "is a coward. What I said is the truth. What proof have you that this negro is the murderer?"

"We caught him running from the shack —right after the shot was fired."

"Did he admit his guilt?"

"Certainly not."

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"What did he say?"

The spokesman flushed.

"I'm not here to be cross-questioned. He didn't say anything much except that he had stopped in the shack, found the body there, and then was running to let us know. It seems to me that anybody could have thought of a better lie than that."

"I'm going to take him back with me and see that he has a fair trial."

The brother of the dead man stepped forward, his fine, clean-cut features drawn and determined.

"Sheriff Potter," he said, "we've always liked you and your conscientiousness, but this man killed my brother, and we're going to lynch him. You're not dealing with an ordinary mob. You know every one of us, and you know that we can't be intimidated by any man who ever lived."

Potter raised his hand.

"I'm only asking you to listen to reason, boys. I've taken a solemn oath never to have a lynching in this county if it can possibly be stopped. There hasn't been one since I've been she'iff—an' there ain't going to be!"

Barfield stepped forward. Potter whirled and covered him with his revolver. Young Dave crouched, ready for trouble.

"I've spoken, Tom Barfield," rasped the sheriff, and his steely eyes glittered menacingly. "I'm a man o' my word. If you come one step closer, I'll shoot you, so help me!"

Barfield saw—saw, and understood. He dropped back.

The sheriff held the crowd with his eyes; without letting his glance waver he kicked the being at his feet.

"Get up!" he growled.

The negro climbed slowly to his feet, his supple fingers gingerly touched his throat where the rope had left a long, brown, vivid welt. He stood weakly between Potter and his son.

Potter slowly backed away.

"Much obliged for acting so decently, boys," he half smiled, as he swept the menacing revolver before the uncertain crowd. "I'm going to walk back to the jail with this here man. You all have the power to take him, but if you try it there'll be two dead men before you succeed—me and one of you. If you think he's worth that, come ahead!"

He turned, outwardly calm, and motioned to his son. The trio slowly walked away, up through the Sahara-like stretch of roadway. Barfield drew his revolver and stepped furiously after them. He was held back by two pairs of powerful arms.

"Come back, Tom," they urged in one voice. "You know Ol' Dave Potter as well as we do. The negro'll be hanged anyway. What's the use of swapping two lives for him?"

Slowly, hesitatingly, abashed, the crowd dispersed in the fashion of some disintegral beast, deprived of legitimate prey by a superior force. Some walked quietly home; husbands and brothers turned their steps to the picnic grounds, where, under the trees, the women of the South stood and wondered. They waited, tears in their eyes; but they had not protested. It was Southern justice.

To these women the men, sullen of mien, chafing under the leash of thwarted desire, confessed their failure.

III

IT WAS after ten o'clock that night when the sheriff, suddenly aged, listlessly opened his big front door and shuffled unsteadily up the stairs to his room. His face was haggard; the eyes gleamed with an unwonted light; underneath were strange, sagging flesh-lobes. His wife, sweet-faced, slender, about his age, had heard of the lynching episode and was waiting for him. She crossed the room swiftly as he closed the door of their bedroom and her soft arms went tenderly about his neck.

"My dear, brave man!" she crooned; and he, man-like, unashamed of emotion, buried his face in her hair and sobbed.

She sensed a calamity. Stepping back she gazed at him.

"David! David! What's the matter?"

He brushed the man-tears from his fine eyes and faced her squarely.

"Bessie—wife! Sit down, and—and be calm. I have something unpleasant to tell—something I wish I did not have to tell; but—I—I—need your help!"

She waited silently for him to tell the story in his own way. He seated himself beside her on the bed, and she gently took his hand in her tiny one and patted it caressingly, as she had been wont to do in the days when their bridal trip was an event of the future, not a memory.

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"Tell me, David. I'll help you—and bear it."

"You heard—about—the Grove—this afternoon?"

"Jim Barfield's murder, and the lynching incident?" she questioned.

He nodded dully.

"Yes. I saved the negro."

She pressed his hand more tightly.

"What danger you went through with!" she breathed.

"Danger? That crowd would not have hurt me. I *had* to save the negro."

"Why, certainly you did," she agreed, puzzled withal at something in his tone. "It was your duty——"

"I don't mean that. Duty might have sent me there, but maybe I'd have gone slower if I hadn't known that the negro was innocent!"

"Innocent? How did you know?"

"Because—" his big eyes dimmed, and he threw his brawny arm about her slender waist, drawing her to him until she wanted to cry out with the pain of it—"because, Bessie, not more than five minutes before I heard of the proposed lynching—young Davie—told—me—that—*he*—mur—shot Jim Barfield!"

Her body tensed. She sidled around and gazed at him as a doomed bird gazes at the snake, terror in her eyes—terror and unbelief. But she did not have to speak; she saw truth, absolute, positive, unalterable truth, reflected in his eyes. She gasped hysterically, then her nerves gave way, and with a wild, heart-broken sob she flung herself on his breast and wept. Big tears coursed down his lined cheeks and mingled with hers.

"S-s-s-h!" he soothed. "S-s-sh! don't cry, girl. He told me all about it. It wasn't his fault. But I'm not strong enough to fight alone—I'm—I'm afraid, girlie, that it might be legally defined as—as—murder!" He winced at the ugly word, and she huddled closer.

Then the mother instinct came to the front.

"Nobody knows Davie—shot—Jim, do they?"

"No."

"You're the only one?"

Her eyes sparkled a trifle; she fairly radiated with new-born hope.

"Yes."

His voice was colorless.

"Then—then——"

He interrupted:

"That's the problem I've been fighting out—and I have come to you—his mother—with it. I'm nearly crazy."

"What would they do to—the negro?"

"Hang him!"

She shuddered.

"Suppose they knew it—was—Davie. What would they do to him?"

"I've tried to reason it out. The Barfields are prominent, but so are we. They could hang him—or he might only get five years in the penitentiary. They could not let him go free."

She realized the ultimatum.

"It's Davie—or the negro!"

"Yes, Davie or the negro. For Davie, a penitentiary term; for the negro—death!"

The word chilled her blood, and she grew frantic.

"But, David, if—if you—told, they might send Davie up for life, or—or—they might—hang—him!"

"Yes."

She threw her arms about him in a fresh access of fear. In a moment she forgot everything save that she was a mother. The unreasoning, instinctive sense of the mother-love engulfed the man-made code of honor. She knew that her child, the flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone, was endangered; and she pled.

"You *can't* tell!" she cried. "You *can't!*"

He looked beseechingly, hopelessly, at her wide-open eyes.

"That's what I've been trying to make myself believe."

"You can't sacrifice our boy," she urged. "It would kill me—if—they—should—should——"

"I've sworn to do my duty."

She ripped loose from his embrace and sprang to her feet, her body quivering. Here was something tangible she had to fight. She fairly blazed at him:

"You *sha'n't* tell! What do I care about your honor when the very life of our son is in the balance? What is your honor to you when Davie is gone? Don't talk to me of honor now! Lie, I tell you—*lie!* Do anything; but save—our—Davie."

"You forget," he said patiently, "you forget that if I am silent an innocent man will die."

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Her head dropped, and then she raised it defiantly.

"He's only a negro," she muttered rebelliously.

"He's human. I don't love negroes—but he's human—and he's *innocent!*"

IV

THE case of the State of South Carolina *vs.* Sam Tarbee was the first thing on the calendar for Tuesday of court week. The first day's cases had been uninteresting, and had been speedily disposed of by the boyish-looking judge, who had forced long sittings and frowned on legal delays in hopes of a speedy adjournment.

The tiny hotel in Karnak had been crowded since the opening of the session with a multitude of types—the judge, a dozen or so of lawyers from the country, and even from the city of Charleston—a motley conglomeration of witnesses, sallow and fever-stricken, loose-jawed and piously profane. The accommodations were unusually poor, the food badly cooked, and the tempers of those who were forced to put up with it on edge.

From shortly after sunup Tuesday morning, vehicles streamed into Karnak from the pinelands to the west, and out of Hell-Hole Swamp, which bounded it on the east. Steadily they came—surreys, barouches, wagons, ox-teams, carriages and even one or two puffy, asthmatic little runabouts—each bearing its passengers to the little enclosure about the red-brick court-house.

Empty wagons stood jammed together. The horses were tied, fed and left lazily grazing at the ends of their hitching-ropes—grazing on the nearly bare ground where there had once been grass. As the morning wore on a new arrival or so drifted in, hitched his horse or mule hurriedly and sped into the court-room. Many of the morbid crowd had brought lunch, and on the court-house veranda two old mammies dispensed peanuts and home-made root beer. A stranger would have thought a picnic was in progress.

Extra accommodations had been provided in the court-room. The rows of seats ranged behind the second rail in pew-like array, all coated with dust. Along the wall were seats, chairs of all sorts, camp-stools and flimsy boxes. In the extreme rear of the room the entryway had been cleared to accommodate more spectators, and fresh sawdust had been sprinkled on the floor.

In the very front of the room towered the judge's bench, scratched and battered by years of hard service. Below, and directly in front, sat the clerk of the court and the stenographer, an athletic young chap, who looked as if he had strayed in from the football field, and who betrayed no interest in the impending case. The clerk and stenographer were seated within the second enclosure. Outside of that there was another railing, within which sat the dynamic little attorney for the defense and the smiling solicitor, who fussed confidently with a pile of papers on his desk.

The judge walked in from one of the two rear rooms, his boyish face grave—this was his first murder case. He wore his severe black robe unassumingly, and bowed in a friendly and courteous manner to the lawyers assembled, who rose in a body as he took his seat.

Heavy steps sounded, and the crowd craned to the back of the room. The gathering which blocked the doorway parted abruptly and the sheriff strode in, half dragging, half pushing Sam Tarbee, the accused negro.

IN THAT court-room there were three persons only who believed the negro innocent. One was Tarbee himself, who submitted dumbly, afraid to protest, dimly understanding that he was on trial for his life and that it was already forfeited. The second was the tall, brawny sheriff who clutched him by the collar. The third was seated inconspicuously in the corner of the court-room. It was David Potter, junior, the son of the sheriff—the real murderer.

There was no trouble in drawing the jury; the sentiment was so strong against the accused man, and had been again aroused to such a pitch by a sight of his terror-stricken face, that the little lawyer for the defense knew that he could gain nothing by exercising his right of peremptory challenge. For the same reason, the solicitor made no objections to the jury-list.

In the prisoner's docket, seated in a broken cane chair, was Sam Tarbee, half facing the jury, half facing the judge. On the faces of the twelve men in whose hands his life had been placed he saw the verdict. He was convicted before trial and he knew

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it. He glanced furtively from the jury-box to the face of the judge, hoping there to find a ray of hope, a glint of encouragement, a straw to which he could clutch, but he encountered nothing but a chill preoccupation as the man in the black robes frowned attentively over the evidence of the first witness.

Sure of his case, the solicitor relentlessly refused to leave a single straw unturned. Election day was approaching, his audience was select, several newspapermen were present, the case was comparatively easy, and he worked hard.

Slowly, surely, unerringly, he built up an unshakable case for the state. Witness after witness went on the stand. His cleverly worded questions tightened the web about the negro.

The attorney for the defense was one of the best lawyers in that part of the state; but he was fighting a losing battle. He attempted to prove an alibi and failed signally. One witness asserted that Sam had been with him about twenty minutes before the shooting, but three or four witnesses on cross-examination told the jury what every man on it already knew, that the place where the negro had been twenty minutes before the shooting was not more than five minutes' walk from the scene of the tragedy.

The case neared its end. It was evident that the jury would probably not be forced to leave the box. A chain of irrefutable circumstantial evidence had done its work well. The accused had been found a few seconds after the firing of the fatal shot running from the little cabin under the oaks. He had said he went in there, found the body and ran for help.

Several witnesses testified that they had examined the place. They found the body near the door, and at the other side of the room was the revolver. The murdered man had been shot in the back of the head, precluding the possibility of suicide. One witness testified that he had seen Barfield walk toward the shack and that he had been alone. It was requisite that the guilt of the accused be established beyond a reasonable doubt. The prosecutor had removed every doubt.

The lawyer for the defense put Tarbee on the stand; his testimony was pitifully meager and true. He made a poor witness, repeating his maudlin tale over and over again, insisting that it was true, sticking doggedly to his story.

"I been walkin' to'ards de Grove, Massa Jedge," he said, "w'en I years de 'volver go *'bang!'* jes' like dat. I run in dere an' seen Massa Jim a layin' dere all bloody up, an' I git skeered an' run down to git help an' tell de white folks down yonder at de picnic groun's. W'ile I been runnin' dey come 'long an' grabs me, an' carries me back wid dem——"

And so his tale went, true to the letter, yet incriminating because of its very lack of embellishment.

ONLY once during the course of the trial did the sheriff dare glance to the back of the room where the guilty man was seated. The look on his son's haggard features caused him to shift his eyes quickly to the face of the accused. The boy sat still, watching his father appealingly, the blood coming and going from his prematurely worn cheeks. The perspiration poured in a stream from his forehead and he used a huge palm-leaf fan viciously.

The sheriff was seated between the stenographer's table and the prisoner's stand; he gazed now at the negro, now at the judge. Occasionally one of the lawyers addressed him, and he answered monosyllabically, smiling mechanically. The cold sweat lay damp on his brow, and he mopped it time and again with a big handkerchief. He realized that two trials were in progress in that court-room; that he was the judge in the second; that he, too, held a life in his hand; that two human fates were in his palm—the fate of the negro charged with the murder and the fate of his son.

The son, gazing at his father's averted head, knew what was passing in the sheriff's mind. He, too, felt as if he were on trial. He knew the traditional Potter honor well. So great had been the mental strain that more than once he had come within an ace of making a clean breast of the whole thing and serving whatever term should be given him; but always he had paused on the verge of a committal act. He left the matter with his father, trusting parental love to subdue the importunities of conscience.

The trial droned on. The dead stillness outside made the court-room oppressive. Swarms of buzzing insects hummed by the wide-open widows, and some whirred into

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the room, as if to witness the drama. The bodily heat of the crowd partly putrefied the atmosphere, and the only movement was the constant undulation of the lake of fans which swayed back and forth, back and forth.

The prosecutor was addressing the jury, his voice expressive, his words well chosen and caustic. Time after time he turned toward the prisoner in mentioning some especially brutal phase of the alleged crime, and each time he did so his lips writhed into a biting sneer. He had been a friend to the dead man, and the words of scathing denunciation rolled thick and fast from his eloquent tongue.

He reviewed the case briefly, haranguing on the menace of bringing in a verdict with a recommendation to mercy. He pleaded with the jury to sentence this man to death—and then again he reverted to the crime which had snuffed out young Barfield's life.

THE negro could not understand the import of the prosecutor's words. So he sat dumbly, knowing only that the flood of bitter oratory was directed at him. But the guilty man in the audience writhed under the vitriolic arraignment. He squirmed in his seat, started to his feet with the vague idea of fleeing. But something held him there, some unfathomable fascination. It was the thought that at any moment might come that *dénouement* which he feared and yet for which he almost yearned.

He repressed an almost uncontrollable desire to scream his guilt, to tell that he, and not the poor wretch in the prisoner's docket, had murdered Barfield, but he pulled himself together each time that it seemed that his emotions must master. And he sat—and waited.

Through the speech of the prosecutor the crowd buzzed. The old blood lust which had flamed to the surface the day of the crime coursed in their veins again, brightening tired eyes and quickening pulses. Not even the plea of the able defendant's attorney could still that passion call for their kind of revenge. Many a man there fingered the revolver in his pocket and longed for "jes' a chance!"

The address of the negro's attorney had lacked that greatest of all requisites, conviction. He felt that his client was guilty; in fact he had urged him to plead that way. Therefore his talk was, of necessity, half-hearted, although he tried conscientiously.

The charge of the judge was short and simple. The case, he said, had been builded on circumstantial evidence. He charged the jury to bring in a verdict of murder if their minds were free of all doubt as to the guilt of the accused. He directed them that they might bring in a verdict of murder with a recommendation to mercy, a verdict peculiar to the South Carolina criminal courts, on which a sentence of life imprisonment might be given. He also told them that if they, or any of them, entertained a reasonable doubt as to the negro's guilt, the verdict should be for acquittal. The jury filed out. Many expressed surprise that it left the box.

The audience talked in low whispers while the jury was in conference; and they wondered why the twelve men stayed out so long. Five minutes passed. Nothing had been heard from the jury-room. Ten minutes—fifteen—twenty—half-an-hour; still the jury remained out.

The prisoner straightened a trifle. His eyes lighted with a first vestige of hope. There were big, determined men there among the crowd who swore that should the verdict be for acquittal the negro would hang. The vindictive feeling, the desire to avenge a death first-hand was strong in them. These men in the crowd were sons of the old terror, the Ku-Klux-Klan.

Forty-two minutes from the time they filed out, the jury returned. The twelve faces were inscrutable; most of them were stern; they all frowned deeply. The sheriff gazed at them in surprise, the son with hope delineated in every line of his face. The men filed into the jury-box and seated themselves. The foreman rose.

"Do you find the prisoner, Sam Tarbee, guilty or not guilty?"

The voice of the judge was tense. He leaned forward, his bright eyes burning into the foreman's somber ones, his black-sleeved arm shoving a small pile of papers on his desk. They cluttered to the floor, but his eyes did not waver. Only the sheriff noticed the incident, and he smiled foolishly to himself.

Save for the monotonous, mechanical swishing of the palmetto fans and the occasional scraping of feet on the wooden floor as some spectator leaned farther

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forward better to glimpse the tragedy, not a sound could be heard.

The foreman craned his neck, cleared his throat, then coughed. His voice was thick, yet understandable—

"Guilty——"

An audible gasp arose. The judge relaxed a trifle. The shadow of a smile dawned on the face of the prosecutor. The foreman paused a second, unconsciously adding a touch of melodrama to a tensely dramatic situation—

"—of murder!" he finished.

There was no recommendation to mercy. The negro must hang. The court-room rustled. Those near the door reluctantly started down the steps. The chatter subsequent to every murder trial started, and the men talked menacingly. They hated, loathed, despised, this bit of humanity who had murdered one of their own blood, one of their leaders.

THE sheriff and his son exchanged glances. The latter pleaded with his eyes. The father turned away abruptly and crushed a sheaf of legal papers in his hand.

And there, in the very presence of the guilty man, the voice of Justice spoke, and Sam Tarbee was sentenced to death by the boyish judge, who grew a bit white around the lips as he huskily pronounced the sentence which meant taking away the life of a human being.

The dispersing crowd gathered into groups in the court-room, on the crooked stairway and in the court-house yard, discussing the trial. The judge rose slowly from his chair and walked with firm, steady steps to his private room; but once safe in its seclusion he sank limply into a chair, wiped his face fussily with a streaked handkerchief and grinned foolishly; he wanted to cry.

The condemned man sat motionless, his eyes fixed on a red-ink blotch on the floor. The sheriff followed his gaze and saw the spot. He shuddered; it looked like blood.

Potter touched his man on the shoulder. Tarbee rose and waited for the command. The crowd in the aisle stood aside. Slowly the sheriff and his prisoner walked down the dusty aisle.

Just before the strange pair reached the door some one hailed the sheriff. He collared Tarbee and turned to speak with the man who had accosted him. Young David Potter, forcing his way out from between the rows of benches, was blocked in the passage, shoulder to shoulder with the negro. They gazed at each other—the negro unseeing, emotionless, steady, the white man with furtive, guilty eyes. Young Potter tried to push past, but the aisle was blocked. He sank limply into a seat, his temples throbbing, nerves tingling.

The sheriff and his prisoner walked down the steps and across the sun-baked court, their feet crunching on the shell walk. On both sides of them the people stared curiously, the men mouthing incoherent menace which the black wretch seemed not to hear. Only his rolling white eyes indicated a sense of the knowledge of their hostility and blood thirst. Even one woman vindictively said—

"Serves him right."

Through the gate went the pair, the negro walking in front, the sheriff slightly to the rear and on one side, his hand resting ostentatiously on the butt of his revolver. In the second-story window of the court-house the figure of young Dave Potter was framed, watching the pair.

Tom Barfield, the brother of the dead man, strolled from the court room and stood next to Potter in the window. The sheriff turned his head for a fleeting instant and saw the picture. Young Dave turned, saw who stood next to him, flushed scarlet, and abruptly moved away.

Down the path which led through a narrow, dense bit of woodland to the iron-barred county jail walked the sheriff with his prisoner. A few curious eyes still followed them. The prisoner shuffled along with that apish stride peculiar to his race, his long, muscular arms swinging to within a little more than a foot from the ground, his feet kicking up tiny dust clouds as he walked. His bullet-shaped head was dropped well forward between his shoulders. His mouth, with its thick, brutish lips, hung half open; in his eyes was a mute appeal—he may have been praying.

Behind him walked the sheriff, erect, broad of shoulder and firm of carriage, head thrown well back, left hand swinging idly, the right still resting on the revolver-butt. They disappeared beyond a turn in the path. In the bushes which lined the pathway, a mocking-bird trilled merrily and a bob-white shrilled a greeting from a near-by

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field. From the swamp came the occasional raucous croak of a frog. Far off in a pasture a red, sad-eyed cow mooed mournfully.

In the courtyard many of the spectators were hitching up their horses for the homeward trip. Everywhere was that feeling of restlessness, of dissatisfaction. The judge walked out on the veranda of the courthouse and paused to chat with young Dave Potter. Tom Barfield joined them and silently wrung the judge's hand. Potter turned away.

He could not look squarely into the eyes of any man.

V

WHEN the sheriff reached his house that night, supper was long since over, his wife had retired, and his son sat on the steps, head pillowed in his hands, thinking, thinking, thinking, as he had been doing for hours.

It was awful. Another man stood condemned, actually sentenced to die by hanging for a crime which he, a David Potter, scion of an aristocratic Southern line, had committed. Of course, the condemned man was a negro, but the thought recurred with increasing force that he was a man—a human being.

Down there somewhere in the swamps, a thousand hoarse-voiced frogs mocked at him; a night-owl hooted derisively from a tree-top near the house. He walked to his room, heard his mother's sobs through a half-open door and tiptoed out on the piazza again. He, a murderer—and not man enough to take his medicine!

The sheriff joined him, dropping his arm affectionately on the boy's shoulder and then removing it. They faced each other there on the steps of their big, rambling home and talked it over.

The sheriff had decided!

Now he wanted the boy to decide for himself, but to decide as his father had done. The suddenly aged man wondered whether the lad had enough of the family honor to do so. To him, anything was better than this haunting fear of other men, this transferring of guilt to an innocent negro.

"Son," he said gently, "you look worried."

The boy flung wide his arms in a gesture of appeal.

"I am, dad; worried to death. I—I—things just can't go on this way. It's awful! I met—Tom Barfield—today—twice. I couldn't look him in the eyes. He looked like Jim——"

"I know, son. I felt that way myself."

"And when they were trying him," the boy went on brokenly, "I suffered more than the man there in the docket. Every word the prosecutor said got right in to me. I squirmed, I writhed—if it hadn't been for mother I'd have gotten up there in the court-room and screamed my guilt."

"Maybe," said the sheriff gently, "it would have been better if you had!"

Their eyes met. The father's meaning was plain. Dully the boy nodded, just comprehending.

"Yes—dad; maybe—it—would."

"And you will——"

The sheriff's voice was eager.

"I'd do it now, this minute," said the lad eagerly—and then his voice softened—"but I'm thinking of mother, dad. You—and—I, we're men—I could take my term in the penitentiary; and you—well, you could stand it. But—it—would kill mother."

"Yes."—the sheriff's head drooped—"it would be—hard—on her."

"So what can I do, dad?" the boy pleaded. "I want to confess, I give you my word I do. I'm a Potter——"

"That's it exactly, son. You are a Potter, and there is your answer. You might not confess now, but the very Potter blood in you would keep that negro from hanging. The Potters have lived in this place for a couple of hundred years, lad; they shed their blood in the Revolution and in the Civil War, under Lee. They're known as men—as men of honor, of courage; as men to whom a lie, to whom deception, is a worse crime than any listed in the statute books.

"It's got to come, lad. I'm your father; I love you, boy; but I want, first of all, to see my son a man. Go to the penitentiary. It will break my heart; it will break your mother's heart. But we will find some solace in knowing that our boy is a man—a man worthy of the family name he bears. It's got to come, sooner or later——"

The voice of the elder man broke pitifully and the boy pressed his hand.

"I'll give myself up, dad," he said firmly, and there was a new dignity, a tone of relief in his deep-chested tones. "It is best."

They sat there together in silence, father

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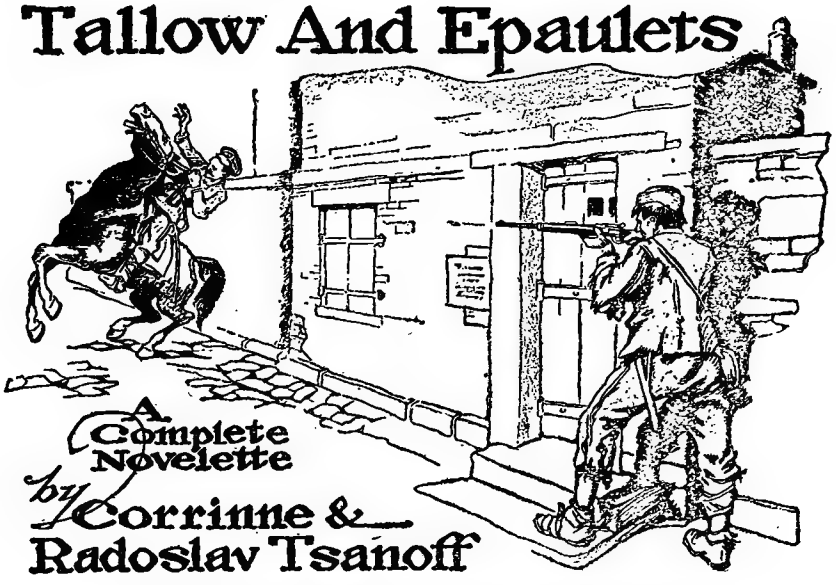
and son, hands tightly clasped. Their blood had decided for them.

Two hoot-owls called to each other. The chorus of frogs in the distance mingled with the humming and buzzing of the myriads of gnats and mosquitos which swarmed about the house. The wall of pine-trees swayed and sighed in the gentle Summer breeze. As the big, full moon forced its light into the barnyard a lusty-lunged rooster crowed; and the big setter awoke and barked.

Tallow And Epaulets



A Complete Novelette by Corrinne & Radoslav Tsanoff

Authors of "Pawns of Liberty," "He That Prepareth the Way."

A FORBIDDING sanctuary is the Cloister of the Holy Cross. Gripping the bald crags of the lower Rhodopes, like an eagle pondering upon her eggs in an aerie, it has turned its back upon the broad Thracian plain where sinful laymen live, and its only gate opens to the higher reaches of the mountain—and God on high.

Three hundred and sixty-four days in the year, the plainsmen of Ladny Vir village, a clump of almond trees and chestnuts at the edge of the vast expanse of the Maritza valley, gaze up at the grim, saintly, leaden cupolas, cross themselves in despairing humility and proceed about their rice-planting or merrymaking. But once a year comes Holy Cross Day and, if halt and lame do remain in Ladny Vir to tend the bed of the dying, all the rest clamber over the cliffs and mix the cheer of their unredeemed peasanthood with the frowning piety of the monastery courts.

To be sure, the Abbot sings through the Festival Liturgy in the morning, and a nasal chorus of barefoot monks chant the *Gospody pomiluy*. But all afternoon the bagpipe keeps time with the *kaval* flute, and a hundred young feet circle in the *horo* dance around the fountain of holy water in the courtyard.

The Thracian sky had always smiled on Holy Cross Day, as long as a Ladny Vir dancer could remember. It smiled in 1912, also. But other clouds were gathering over Bulgaria, portending hailstorms of lead and blood-pour; vague, vagrant rumors of war flitted from ear to ear, a war long dreamed of and final—to free Macedonia and drive the Sultan's iron heel from the Balkans.

Half-uttered dim fears of lonely days and nights of desolation trembled in old women's hearts; anxiety creased the brows of brides and mothers. But the unespoused youth of Ladny Vir laughed at ominous lurking

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tomorrows, shook off the worry of work-days with their work-clothes, and joyed in the cheer of the yearly festival.

The black cylindrical head-gear of the monks set off by contrast the maidens' gay-colored scarfs; long, sweeping cassocks of black-dyed homespun, worn to brown, jostled blue-braided white pantaloons and peasant jerkins of thick wine-colored cheviot. Around the fountain of holy water, embroidered bodices sparkled, silver waist-buckles touched men's scarlet sashes, short silk-bordered petticoats, showing gaily from under shorter overskirts trimmed in gold-woven cord, rustled contentedly, and necklaces of old coins jingled in time with the *kaval* notes as the belles of Ladny Vir wound and unwound the serpentine coils of the village dance, a brave young lad between each two damsels, and paying special court to his right-hand little neighbor.

Soft-voiced, whining gipsy children eeled under the elbows of the older spectators, begging for a copper *stotinka* and fighting with the dogs for a chance sweetmeat some one had dropped.

"Lemonade, *helva*, raspberry sirup!" a tawny, oily-nosed Greek bawled his way through the crowd.

"Get out of the way, you, Spiro," an old peasant chided him. "You are spoiling the dance."

On a bench before the church door, at the top of the broad stone steps, Abbot Clement sat with Father Marko, the village priest, and half-a-dozen other weighty citizens of Ladny Vir. The young fellow at their feet, lounging on the lower steps and apparently listening to their conversation, watched the *horo* dancers and now and then glanced furtively toward the peasants on the opposite side of the circle, where a handful of Ladny Vir maids crowded together, still unclaimed for the dance.

The rice-planters nodded friendly greetings as they passed the young man, and small lads and lassies catching his eye, dropped shy, half-intimate courtesies. Ladny Vir had grown fond of its learned schoolmaster during his year of service; but he was a son of the gloomy cloister-vaults, foster-son of the dark-faced, stern Abbot Clement, and somehow kept aloof from intimate relationships in the village. Ladny Vir peasants watched him daily go down and up the rocky path alone, lost in meditation, and a strange, simple-minded pity mingled with their unlearned respect as they returned his grave greeting.

The same reserved, half-studied air of calm and abstraction, which characterized the faces of the monks, had stamped itself on the face of their novitiate. But instead of the even tenor of their pious complacence, an ill-suppressed impetuosity, a look of thirsty longing battled with and half-stormed through the serene exterior of his countenance.

The entire make-up of Schoolmaster Liubomir was one of contrasts. Taller he was by half a hand than Ladny Vir peasants and rather slim around the waist, but broad-chested and solid to the bone. His black hair hung low and half-shaded his broad forehead. Men turned again to look at his face, somewhat bony, with a long, hard-looking, aquiline nose, and curved, impatient lips. No shade of brown mixed in the black of his heavy eyebrows that met above his nose, and the shaded eyes had the elusive gray blackness of a deep pine woods in a night storm when lightning arrows dart through the branches. It was a face of an idealist in action, a dreamer on the *qui vive*, a poet tending a buzz-saw.

Another girl joined the little cluster Liubomir had been watching.

"Come, Bogdana, why won't you dance?" she called.

The maid in the center frowned at the question.

"I don't want to dance, Petka," she answered. "Go back; you will lose your own place."

"But do come along," Petka urged. Then she whispered slyly, "Why isn't the schoolmaster dancing either?"

Bogdana's face crimsoned.

"Go and ask him. How should I know?" she retorted. "Perhaps it is the music; Gosho plays his *kaval* just as he drives pegs in shoes."

"But if you dance, perhaps Master Liubomir will play. Rashko—" she turned to a youth just passing—"Oh, Rashko, Bogdana says she too will dance if you coax the schoolmaster to play!"

The youth turned.

"Don't you believe your sister, Rashko," Bogdana cried in anger. "I said no such thing. I am just going to dance with her."

"And I am just going to ask Liuby to play," Rashko smiled.

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But young Bogdana, wavy-haired Bogdana they called her, clasped Petka's hand and broke into the circle of dancers. The young master, lounging on the church steps, started up as he saw her catch the step.

"Liubomir, my son," the old abbot interrupted him, "was it the twenty-sixth or the twenty-seventh chapter of the Tribulations of the Holy Martyr Haralampi from which we read last night at vesper——"

"The twenty-seventh, Father Clement," the youth answered without waiting for the abbot to finish his question, and lounged back on the step.

Rashko Tosheff forced his way through the crowd and caught Liubomir's hand. He was the schoolmaster's one intimate friend in Ladny Vir.

"Come, Liuby," he urged him, "take that shoemaker's flute and pipe us a decent tune. No one else can match you at it."

But Liubomir hung back.

"It isn't for me, Rashko," he demurred. "I don't feel like *horos* today."

"Nonsense," Rashko chided him. "Have a holiday while you can. Who knows where tomorrow may send us all!"

The shoemaker's *kaval*-playing brought jeers from the crowd and a remonstrance from the dancers.

"Come and take the bungler's place, schoolmaster."

Liubomir laughed and went to the center.

"Let me help you out, Gosho," he said. "Your throat must be getting tired."

The shoemaker's apprentice handed over his flute with a rueful shake of his head.

"I practised all last evening, master," he apologized, "and mother said I had this tune fine when I went to bed. But so many people, you know—" He wagged his head in dismay.

Liubomir lifted the *kaval* to his lips and the dancing circle closed expectantly. Three steps forward, two steps back, they swayed and swung in rhythmic circles while the crowd of lookers-on jostled about them, jesting, praising, criticizing.

DOWN by the gate of the courtyard, the little throng suddenly gave way as a couple of horsemen trotted briskly up the rocky path and entered the court.

"*Heideh deh!*" an old peasant nudged his neighbor excitedly. "Look at Christoff's young dandy come back to count his father's money!"

His neighbor, a gnarly old rustic leaning on a stubby cane, cackled in delight.

"Watch the fun now if he tries to dance with Ivanoff's daughter," he whispered. "Vassil Christoff and the schoolmaster can't both remain within ten elbow-lengths of the wavy hair of her."

The first horseman stood in his stirrups and studied the Ladny Vir crowd appraisingly. He wore the uniform of a lieutenant in the regular army; his untarnished sword clanked at his side as the horse pawed in impatience; the single star and stripe on his epaulet glistened in the sunlight. Years in the military academy, and a score of months' polishing in European capitals had made Ladny Vir's son a stranger in the village. And young Christoff cultivated the distinction.

He had been home all Summer, paying lively court to the only daughter of Dontcho Ivanoff, the wealthiest rice-planter of Ladny Vir, and there he and the schoolmaster had renewed the lively hatred of their childhood, when Vassil spat at the stupid piety of the cloister and Liubomir sniffed at the village tallow-merchant's son. But both of them had avoided an open quarrel.

Vassil had waited this afternoon until the whole village was at the festival; then, with his orderly, he urged his horse up the donkey-path and galloped into the monastery courtyard. His glance followed the circle before the church steps; he sprang from his saddle, flung his reins to the orderly, and pushed his way through the crowd, bristling with self-consequence, the epauleted lieutenant of Ladny Vir! At the edge of the dance, he waited until Bogdana came around, then broke into the circle.

"Heigh-ho, peasant lads!" he laughed boisterously, "I'll show you how to dance!"

The schoolmaster whirled about and faced the intruder. The music stopped, an ominous quiet. The dancers halted; even the crowding peasants grew sober. It is no slight insult when a Bulgar *kaval*-player refuses to play for a newcomer.

"Pipe, you wriggly bookworm!" Vassil shouted.

Liubomir's lips worked with anger and

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contempt, but when he spoke his voice was calm enough.

"This is a festival for honest peasants. If you scorn Ladny Vir, why do you mix in its dances?"

"Are you going to recite your lesson to a lieutenant of the army? Use your wind to better purpose," Vassil retorted. "I don't know how to wait, and I'll not be taught by the son of a thief and a beggar."

"A thief and a beggar!" the crowd murmured, and looked at the abbot.

The words went home. Try as he might, Liubomir had never been able to extract from Abbot Clement the story of his parentage. Now he quivered at Vassil's thrust.

"Leave our fathers out of this," he spoke through gritted teeth. "Yours is not here today, and mine you do not know."

"Nor does any one want to know a stinking noonday robber!" young Christoff sneered.

Liubomir gripped hard at the flute.

"Will you play?" the lieutenant hissed.

Liubomir did not move, but his eyes looked straight into Vassil's, matching angry scorn with defiance. For a long minute they glowered at each other, then the lieutenant's hand went to his sword. The breathless dancers gasped as the blade flashed through the air, and one-half of the *kaval* flew to the ground. The player's left hand still clutched the other half, but his right hand gripped the lieutenant's collar, and the next moment Vassil's spotless uniform wiped up the dusty stones of the courtyard.

"Liubomir!"

He caught the girl's arm, trying to draw her away.

"Bogdana," he whispered in the confusion. "Listen! Let me tell you why."

"Go away," she shook him off, half-sobbing with mortification. "You shame me before the whole village."

Haughty, erect, Liubomir walked through the crowd that opened a path for him, along the stone-arched corridors, and up to his monastic cell under the tiled eaves. Bogdana's last words sounded above the din below, where the peasants were going away, discussing the broken-up dance.

"Father Clement must tell me now," he muttered as he paced back and forth across the narrow room.

"Let me know if I have shamed her!"

II

THE young man's voice was eager, insistent, half-pleading, half-querulous.

"I am almost twenty-one years old, Father Clement," he begged, "and know no more than the Rhodope goats of my parentage. You saw what happened yesterday; you imposed penance on me. All night I have thought it over. I am not a monk; I will not do your penance."

Proud, defiant, the young man faced his foster-father in the little chapel where the abbot had detained him after the morning liturgy. He had waited until the soft, shuffling steps of the monks had died away and the old sexton had pushed the bolt into the chapel door before he spoke. For Liubomir had made up his mind at last to know his own history.

Outside, the mountain-slopes were noisy with the early morning work of the cloister servants, but the soft bleating of the sheep and the shrill braying of the donkeys as they went to pasture never intruded on the musty solemnity of the chapel. Crimson curtains guarding the entrance to the altar hung in heavy folds behind the abbot. An image of the Virgin and Child in supernal blue, divinely smiling, crowded the wall to the right, and on the left, the Christ, thorn-crowned, bled in conventional scarlet.

The old abbot rested his hands limply on the arms of his high, wood-carved chair and seemed as motionless as the icons behind him while Liubomir was speaking. At the last rebellious outburst, he tapped his forefinger nervously on the head of the crouched wooden lion that formed the front of his chair-arms, but there was more of sadness than of rancor in his voice when he spoke.

"I had hoped by much patient teaching and example, my son, to wipe out from your mind this carnal curiosity. I did indeed enjoin penance on you last night for your riotous, unprovoked attack——"

"Unprovoked, Father Clement!" the schoolmaster protested. "His very existence is my provocation. If I am the son of a thief and a beggar, a noonday robber, let me know." He laughed bitterly. "You want to make a monk of me? This may be the easiest way to do it."

Clement shot a keen glance at the younger man; then he looked away as his finger resumed its nervous tapping and he said:

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"Early one icy morning, twenty years ago last January, two women knocked at our gate. Brother Malachi—he was porter then—gave them asylum and called me to see them. One was very weak and ill, almost frozen; and her strength torn to shreds by the mountain blasts. The other was an older woman, weather-beaten and tough, and one warm meal made her fit to nurse her weak companion. I wished to watch and pray at her bedside, but I was not abbot then and was allowed to visit her only twice a day.

"She did not need many visits, Liubomir. You were born the second night. I had been walking up and down the courtyard in the snow for hours—waiting. Dawn was just coming over Ostry peak when the nurse-woman ran out.

" 'Quick, Holy Brother,' she called to me. 'Ruja wants you. And bring the holy water.'

"I did not stop to call the abbot, but ran as fast as I could up to the little cell where Ruja lay. She pulled away the covers and I saw you beside her.

" 'Christen him, Ivan!' she cried. 'Christen my boy.' "

"Ivan?" Liubomir interrupted. "Did she know your name before you took your vows, Father Clement?"

The abbot swallowed hard.

"She was not—an entire stranger to me, my son. I had—known her from childhood—years before."

The younger man bit his lip and suppressed any further questioning.

"I touched your forehead with my damp fingers.

" 'His name shall be——?'

"She did not hear me.

" 'His name, Ruja? What will you call him?'

" 'Call him *Liubomir*,' she whispered. 'A lover of peace.'

"Ten minutes later I said the last prayer over your mother, Liuby.

"We kept the woman who had nursed her and she cared for you until you could run about, then she worked at Christoff's house until she died."

"That is how Vassil knows about——"

"When I became abbot," Clement went on without stopping, "I adopted you as my own. My plans were very great. I would educate you here until you were grown; then you should travel and study with the greatest scholars. When you returned, I expected you to become the leader of our Bulgar church."

Abbot Clement shook his head sadly.

"But your heart has never belonged to us, my son," he sighed. "When you were a mere baby, you kicked and screamed through our most solemn services. Once when you were seven years old, as we all knelt praying in this chapel on the afternoon of a day of fasting, you jumped to your feet and broke our sacred silence, crying:

" 'You are all asleep. Wake up! I am hungry!'

"Still, patience has taught you patience and a quieter nature, and when I yielded to you and allowed you to go to school in Ladny Vir, I hoped the rougher life there would only turn you back again to our peace. It might have done this, and you might not have chosen a schoolmaster's career, had you not met——"

The abbot stopped with a question in his tone and looked searchingly into the younger man's face.

Liubomir returned his look frankly.

"What would have happened had I not met Bogdana, Father Clement, I do not know," he replied. "But I have met her, and I have felt the touch of men, too, down in Ladny Vir, such as we never feel up here. You have dreamed great dreams, but I am dreaming greater ones, and the Cloister of the Holy Cross can not contain them any longer. I must find my place."

"Wait, my son." The old abbot half-arose from his chair. "Let me guide you. You shall go away; I will send you to Russia. There you may study in the greatest seminaries and find for yourself. Life among men and women is cruel and hard and profitless. See, even now the land is full of war and rumors of war. Any day Bulgaria may be grappling with the Turk. The life of this world is hard and profitless, Liubomir. Let me send you away to study, but promise you will come back to us."

"I shall not come back, good abbot," Liubomir answered. "Life may be cruel out in the world, but it is not tedious. Your peace wearies me utterly. I am lonely, unsatisfied, starving!"

Abbot Clement left his chair and began pacing up and down before the altar, his long black robes swishing about his ankles.

"She has done it," he exclaimed bitterly

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"She has drawn you away from us." He turned almost fiercely on Liubomir. "But you are a fool, boy. You never can win her. She is already betrothed."

"Betrothed?" Liubomir gasped.

"Since the first day of her life," Clement went on, "she has been the promised bride of Vassil Christoff. Her father pledged her at her birth to the son of Pericles, the tallow-merchant, and Dontcho Ivanoff is not a man of many minds."

"But Bogdana has never promised to marry Vassil," Liubomir argued. "And she shall not promise."

"You are bold, my son," the abbot smiled pityingly. "Who are you to say she shall not? Pericles Christoff is rich—his tallow is sold from Adrianople to Roumania, and he has broad fields adjoining Dontcho Ivanoff's. What have you to offer?"

"Not even a name, I know it," Liubomir laughed bitterly. "Schoolmaster Liubomir I am to lads and lasses, as if my trade has fathered me. You have told me a half-story today. What of Vassil's thief and beggar, Father Clement? What of the noonday robber? All Ladny Vir looked at you yesterday, questioning, and you did not open your mouth. What of my father? I am sure you know more."

He pressed more closely to the abbot, afraid to lose him before he learned his secret.

"I have told you a half-story, true. But I have reasons for not telling you the other half. When you are an old man like me, with nothing to lose——"

"No, now!"

The heavy church doors rattled as they swung open and the sexton hobbled inside, his eyes popping from his head. He crossed himself at every step as he hurried to the chapel.

"Good Saint George preserve our souls and the Virgin keep us from torments everlasting," he panted. "The evil days are upon us at last!"

"What is it, Brother Malachi?" The abbot stepped from the chapel and snatched the bit of paper the old man waved in his hand.

"For him," Malachi said in a husky voice.

Clement's face paled as he read the message; then he handed it to Liubomir.

Liubomir, surname unknown, foster-son of Abbot Clement of the Cloister of the Holy Cross, is hereby ordered to report within seventy-two hours at the recruiting post of the village of Ladny Vir, for service in the engineering corps, railroad repair company, in command of

VASSIL CHRISTOFF, Lieutenant.

"So Bulgaria is mobilizing at last," the young man muttered. "And for the final struggle! Ah, what a war it will be, Father Clement, our war—a war for you to bless, for us to die in!"

He folded the slip of paper and put it in his pocket.

"I must report at once," he added.

The abbot leaned heavily on the altar-railing, and for a moment neither spoke. Then Liubomir laid his hand on the old man's arm.

"I am going now, Father Clement," he said, "but won't you promise me that before I leave Ladny Vir for the front, you will tell me of my father—lest I do not come back to hear it later?"

The abbot traced the pattern of the altar-cloth with a lean, trembling finger. To tell him now of all times was to lose him for the church.

"If you do not come back, Liubomir," he replied, "you will never need to know. And if you do come back, you will be happier not knowing. Good-by, my son."

Liubomir stumbled down the rocky path to Ladny Vir, scarcely seeing where he stepped, never thinking that for uncertain months he would be at the beck and call of a man he personally detested. One thought only burned in his soul—he was going to face death, and his father's name was a shame to know. He did not have even a name to offer Bogdana.

III

THE war-clouds over the Balkans blackened. Rumors of grand mobilization became certainties. Little Montenegro was already fighting the Turk, and—wonder of wonders—the Bulgarian nation had made alliance with Serb and Greek, forgetting past jealousies and treacheries, and uniting all Balkandom in a concerted and final attack upon the Sultan's tyranny. Bulgaria's reserves were summoned to the last man; every village greensward became a recruiting camp.

Freedom for Macedonia! Graybeards who had fought the Turk in the seventies for Bulgaria's freedom now sent their sons to battle for their kinsmen across the

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border. And everywhere stern-faced men bade farewells, women smiled through their tears and took up the sickles their husbands had thrown down.

Ladny Vir sent artillerymen, infantry, cavalry. Liubomir, with some other raw recruits under Lieutenant Vassil Christoff, drilled for two hard weeks and were ordered into the engineering division to follow the main army across the Thracian border. He paid a farewell visit to the monastery, but it was brief, and he had neither time nor desire to ask questions. At the last bend of the steep donkey-trail before a projecting cliff hid the front of the red-tiled sanctuary from view, he turned and waved his cap. Something white fluttered from the old abbot's window, and Liubomir went around the bend.

THE entire village collected on the green the next morning when the soldiers marched away. Mothers, sisters and grandfathers crowded for the last word and loaded their soldiers with flowers. Wreaths hung from their shoulders, bouquets hid the regiment numbers on their caps, and from the rifle-muzzles tiny clusters of nasturtiums and asters poked their heads.

"Be sure to write often, Rashko," Petka urged her brother, clinging to his arm. "The envelopes are all stamped and addressed, and the cards, too. And, Rashko," she whispered, "do look after the schoolmaster a little."

"He'll look after himself well enough," he laughed. "I think Dragan over there wants to tell you good-by."

Liubomir stood at the outside of the crowd, watching the partings with curious, eager eyes. In all his orphaned, love-starved boyhood, he had never missed his mother as he did this morning.

"Have some flowers, Master Liubomir. Put them in your cap," a bustling, buxom damsel called, flinging him a hard, thread-bound cluster of asters.

He smiled as he caught them.

"Gosho is watching you, Blagoyka," he cried, tossing them back. "These are not for me."

Bogdana stood in the center of a little group, her arms piled with flowers. He could see her wavy brown hair and catch glimpses of her face as the crowd thinned between them. Vassil Christoff strode up to her.

"And what is my bouquet to be?" he asked gaily, appropriating the top bunch.

"You are welcome to it, lieutenant, and luck be with you!" she laughed.

Here and there she offered them. The man on the outskirts watched them disappear one after the other, roses, asters, home-grown daisies. A dozen times he started toward her, but each time he checked his step. He had shamed her. She could not have forgiven him, and his pride refused to be rebuffed again before them all, at the last moment. Once she turned in his direction and he thought she recognized him, but he whirled on his heel and walked farther away.

The flowers were gone; shaky laughter and tears were all about him. Liubomir leaned against a tree, dry-eyed, utterly alone.

"Why do you avoid us all, Liuby?" The voice was very soft. "You may not be back for a long time."

He turned around and faced her, his heart pounding until it made him gasp. Bogdana stood alone before him, a hurt, questioning look in her brown eyes.

"I didn't know you wanted—that I had the right to come to you," he stammered, "after Holy Cross Day."

"You did break up our dance," she pouted. "And the music was fine then, too."

He laughed. "If I had known that was all——"

"That wasn't all," she hastened to add. "You ruined a spotless uniform. But—that was so long ago."

"Ages," he sighed. "And that uniform has me in complete subjection now."

"Let it, Liuby," she begged. "You *must* not quarrel with him now. He is your officer."

He smiled at her fear.

"Quarrel with my officer, Bogdana? I hate Vassil too much to quarrel with my lieutenant."

"That is a strange spirit in which to go to war, to—God knows what," she checked herself.

He answered not a word.

"But you have been so—forbidding," she went on more softly. "You, our schoolmaster, you have not a single flower, Liuby, and—I have given mine all away."

"You might have saved one—for your schoolmaster," he ventured reproachfully, "if you intended to tell him good-by."

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Her tongue teased him, but her eyes were dim.

"I didn't—not a full-blown flower. But I have this bud. Will you wear that?"

Bogdana held up a single rose, deep crimson, its petals half-unfolded. Liubomir grasped it eagerly.

"Wear it, Bogdana?"

Drums beat and the valley echoed with a long bugle-call.

"You must go," the girl barely whispered.

He clasped her face in his hands, touched the wavy hair, and searched her eyes.

"Bogdana, little darling," he whispered. All his shame and the eyes of Ladny Vir meant nothing to him then. Her lips trembled, his own bent over them. But she shook her head.

"No," she pleaded, "not here, Liuby. Not now."

He let her go.

"Good-by, Liubomir."

"Good-by, Bogdana," he whispered, and stepped into line.

DOWN the dusty road and out across the plain to the south they marched. When Liubomir turned for one last glance at the cluster of women straining their eyes from the hill-slope, he imagined he could still distinguish the slender, wavy-haired figure in white, waving good-by.

Then came the whirlwind campaign in Thrace. With the road-patrol division, Liubomir crossed the border and followed after the army, repairing twisted rails, building cross-country roads for the endless caravans of ox-carts that followed with bread and bullets. They worked in the very shadow of the Adrianople forts, digging, scraping, smoothing, while the siege-guns thundered, the shrapnel whistled about them, and the intermittent *trrrr-pkpkpkpkpk* of the *mitrailleuse* harrowed their ears. Past Adrianople, south to Demotica, and the little stations beyond. At Kara Beili, Liubomir's company, under the command of Lieutenant Christoff, stopped, and there they worked, and watched, and waited for peace.

The first bugles of war, the first roar of cannon, had lulled from the schoolmaster's soul all personal bitterness toward Vassil Christoff. For the private, his old rival did not exist; the man inside the uniform meant nothing to him. The great idea back of the war had possessed Liubomir's whole being, and made him a machine responsive to the slightest urge of martial Bulgaria. And Bulgaria spoke to him through the lips of Vassil Christoff. The lieutenant had not a more dependable man under his charge.

IV

DEAD or alive, a Bulgar soldier is better off on the battle-line than guarding a railroad. The victories are his victories. If he detains a bullet, his name is forever hallowed by monument-carvers; otherwise he can reckon on a free ride home, flowers and tobacco *en route*, and a round of youngsters the rest of his life, gaping at the tale of that unspeakable fourth evening "when Mahmoud Mukhta Pasha almost trapped our company."

But the army railroad-guard does not figure conspicuously on monuments. There is no *where*, *when*, or *how* to commemorate, and consequently no *who*. So at the end of the campaign, when the bayonet-squad recite how they arrived just in time on the fifth morning to insure the victory, he is set at work repairing the road over which the bayoneteers reached the scene. You never saw an army railroad-guard in a triumphal parade.

From November to June, alone or in pairs, up and down the line from Adrianople to the Ægean Sea, those Bulgar sentinels had patrolled every inch of the precious single track. One day it was fourteen miles to the north and back; the next, eleven miles to the south and return. Bands of Turkish irregulars skulked around the road or lurked in the shadow of bridges; the guards swung a Mannlicher over the shoulder and a rail-wrench in the right hand.

The Bulgar whirlwind swept the Turk behind Tchatalja; in London cautious diplomats wrecked the work of the reckless Thracian infantry. Serb and Greek licked their signatures from the treaties of alliance, and plotted the ruin of Bulgaria, whose army, encamped in front of Constantinople, safeguarded them from a Turkish fireback. The lofty allied war sank to a war among allies; and by the end of June the guards of Thrace stepped off the track and watched the loaded Bulgar trains steam past, hurrying to check the treacherous advance of Greek and Serb.

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The last Bulgar regiment left Tchatalja, and the one-time rear-guards became the lone sentinels of a deserted van. News came to them of peace in the West, and war; wild rumors—lurid and contradictory. But they continued on their rounds; fourteen miles to the north and back, eleven miles to the south the next day, and return.

BEFORE a droopy, straw-roofed, manure-plastered shed, backed against the coal-slack embankment south of Kara Beili, half-a-dozen of them, mostly Ladny Vir men, circled hungrily around a huge pot of stew, which gurgled over the hazel-wood fire. The evening wind, blowing from the Sea of Marmora across the war-wasted Thracian plain, stirred the smooth, silvery top leaves of the gaunt poplars, which outline the twists and turns of the lower Maritza River. It was a sultry wind and its breath of hungry death mixed as it reached them with the smells of burned hazel-leaves and garlic.

The day-guards were just in; the night-patrol, almost ready to set out, listened to every word of their comrades. The Bulgar voice is loud, but the men around the stew spoke softly, half-whispering, as if afraid of their own reports.

"We heard that you night-fellows are to separate and one of you to cover the south route again," Rashko Tosheff warned them, fishing among the garlic and beans for a leaner piece of mutton. "I'm right comfortable that this hut covers my cropped head tonight."

"But are the Turks really advancing, Rashko?" Gosho the shoemaker's apprentice interrupted from the other side of the kettle. "For two months past we've been fed on scary tales—mostly wind-gabble."

"Gabble?" the day-guard answered. "If you had been on the track today, Gosho, and seen those refugees from Uzun Kupru scramble over the embankment, you would be piping a different tune tonight. The poor devils had scarcely an extra coat among them. 'Turks! Turks are coming!' Can't you hear the cry sounding from village to village? Every son and daughter of them just grabbed his family and ran. They say Thrace is simply spewing itself into Bulgaria."

"They say," Gosho sniffed. "They've been *saying* all Spring. But, Rashko, what I want to know is: Did any of those shirtless wretches *see* the Turks coming?"

"See, my brave lad? If they had *seen* the Turks, they never would have seen anything afterwards. Uzun Kupru knows better than to sit on its haunches cobbling until it sees Bashi-bazouks at the corner."

The one-time shoemaker's apprentice of Ladny Vir subsided for a moment, broke off a hunk of black rye-bread, and sopped it up and down in his soup.

"I thought so," he took it up again. "It's all hearsay—wind-gabble, I call it. But you forget to remember, Rashko, that our treaty of peace with Turkey was not signed on a joker-card in a Constantinople café. Sir Edward Grey dictated that Peace Protocol in London. That is why I, for one, can snore under the poplar trees—yes, and cobble your old shoes, too, Rashko—even though there is not a whole Bulgar regiment between me and the swarms of fezes at Tchatalja. Do you think Turkey will laugh in England's face, cross the Enos-Midia line and attack us? Why, with her little finger England could——"

"She could, but *will* she, friend Gosho?"

Liubomir stood in front of the shed, buckling on his cartridge-belt, almost ready for the night's patrol.

"Will she, schoolmaster?" Gosho answered. "Of course she will. England's diplomats have her honor to support."

"England's diplomats have her honor to talk about," Liubomir said bitterly. "Diplomacy is their trade. How far do you think the Turks will go, Rashko?"

"To Adrianople they say. And, Liubomir, this is no raid. They are out in full uniform, five hundred and fifty thousand men, an old peasant told me, as if he had counted them."

"Adrianople means Lüle Burgas, Kirk Kilisseh—all we have won," Liubomir mused.

"Why are you borrowing trouble?" Gosho broke in impatiently. "Turkey has ruled long enough in these parts; now she is out, and out she stays. I believe in Europe."

"Yes, *you* believe," Liubomir chided him. "You believed Servia and Greece would stand by their treaties, and you believed great white Russia would keep her word and arbitrate our dispute with the Serbs; and tonight our men are all in Macedonia, facing Serb and Greek; we have scarcely a

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Bulgar rifle left in Thrace. Enver Bey could march his army clear to Sofia in parade uniforms without meeting two Bulgar regiments together. And still you believe, Gosho. It is because our lunatic Bulgaria is full of great believers like you that we have come to this pass!"

"Look!" Rashko jumped to his feet and pointed toward the telegraph station.

"Up, every one of you!" Lieutenant Vassil Christoff cried, racing toward them breathlessly. "The Turks have crossed the Ergene River and may be here before morning. Be ready for the train from Soflu in six minutes!"

The men dropped their bulky cups on the ground, gave their spoons an extra lick by way of a wash, tucked them into their leggings, and rushed inside the hut for their belongings. Liubomir lingered a moment, adjusting a rough mend in his cartridge belt. Vassil tapped him on the arm and said in a lowered voice:

"Of course, Liubomir, these instructions can not include the guard on the south stretch tonight. You must go on the track at once and inspect the bridge before the train gets in. The next train from Soflu will pick you up."

Incredulous, Liubomir stared into his superior's steely gray eyes. Then his own flashed; he clenched his fist. For a moment he forgot where he was; visions of the monastery courtyard filled his memory. But Vassil laid his hand warningly on his sword.

"You are under orders," he hissed and pointed to the track.

"And because I am *under orders*," Liubomir replied through gritted teeth, "I—obey that!"

He laid the tip of his forefinger very lightly on the single star of the lieutenant's epaulet, saluted and started up the track embankment.

In the hut below the men were rolling up their trappings. He was almost at the top of the embankment when he thought he heard Rashko call his name, but he did not go back to find out. He had his orders.

Around the bend, straight away at the horizon-edge of the plain, the headlight of the train from Soflu flashed in sight. The locomotive belched red smoke as it steamed up the grade. Liubomir stood in the middle of the track and watched the hungry wheels gulp rail after rail. The whistle blew a long warning note and the guard stepped aside. Loaded inside and out with their full quota of fifty-five men and eight horses, the long line of box-cars rolled noisily by and stopped in front of the telegraph-office.

He caught sight of a noisy trio of Ladny Vir men whose post was at Soflu, dangling their sandals from the top of one car, but they had not noticed him and to tell them good-by was mutiny. Questions would be asked, answered—not one of them but knew the story of the two men. Liubomir did not want Bogdana made the topic of every fifty-five or -eight car that went up toward Adrianople that night.

His comrades clambered up the embankment to the train, slung their packs on to the tops of the cars and scrambled after them. Only Rashko stopped and looked up and down, puzzled. He put his hands to his mouth and trumpeted through their rounded palms.

"Liuby!" The cry came faintly above the din and hubbub of several hundred soldiers' throats and the puff-and-rattle of the engine. An officer sprang from a coach and ran into the telegraph-office.

Suddenly a panic caught the solitary guard. No one except Lieutenant Vassil Christoff knew where he was; no one but Vassil could tell where he had gone when the report of the Turkish raid had reached the post at Kara Beili.

Recklessly Liubomir dropped his rifle, tore open his tightly buttoned coat and took a sweat-stained envelope from his breast-pocket. An odor of dried rose-leaves caressed his coal-dust-laden nostrils as he peeped at the contents to make sure. He sealed the envelope and raced three ties at a leap down the track toward the train.

Rashko still lingered, wandering from car to car with an extra blanket-roll over his shoulder.

"Here you are!" he cried as he caught sight of Liubomir.

"Listen, Rashko!" Liubomir cut him short, breathing hard between his words. "Put this where you won't lose it. When you get home—to Ladny Vir—find Bogdana at once and—give this to her."

"But you?" Rashko cried in astonishment. "Where are you going?"

"South," Liubomir said in a dull voice. "I am on guard until the next train comes from Soflu. Quick," he urged his comrade, "get on!"

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"Come along, Liuby!"

At that moment Lieutenant Vassil Christoff blew out the light in the telegraph-office and entered the one coach of the train. The chain of cars shivered as the wheels began to grind on the rails. Liubomir shoved Rashko on.

"Any other message?" the day-guard caught the ladder of the last car and swung himself up.

"Nothing," Liubomir answered, running alongside. "Give it only to her."

They clasped hands warmly.

"Jump on, Liuby!" Rashko urged. "For God's sake jump on!"

But Liubomir jerked his hand away and stopped running.

"My rifle is back there," he smiled. "Anyhow I am under orders—here."

"Tell her *that!*" he shouted after the moving-car.

Rashko's sun-browned face paled.

"Liuby," he cried desperately, "this is the last train!"

But the one remaining guard on the track south of Kara Beili waved a salute and walked back for his rifle. When he shouldered it and turned around, the train was fading away in the distance, a dark streak surmounted by a floating smoky cloud. He watched it until the red light of the last car twinkled away and he saw once more the two deserted rails merge into a vanishing point. Then he put a fresh magazine of bullets in his Mannlicher and started on his patrol, eleven miles south toward Soflu.

He was not patrolling the track for the first time alone. But always before, when he started out, the day-guards were sprawling around the camp-fire he had lighted; and a group at Asar Beili, the station ahead, were snoring before another such fire; while up and down, along that identical track, other men kept the same vigil as himself. He could almost catch the rhythm of their steps and the occasional click of their Mannlichers on the humming rails.

They were all alone, yet all paced through the same dark, wild Thracian night, and he felt no lack of comradeship. They were but parts of the stupendous human machine that was to crush out five hundred years of Turkish tyranny. The idea of it impelled him resistlessly, it swayed every other desire or regret, and urged him into any danger.

The night through which he tramped was not riddled by whirring *mitrailleuse* or whistling shrapnel, but its mute, shapeless expanse was surcharged with no less ominous possibilities. The very air he breathed smelled of death. Yet, alone though he often was, he paced on through the lurking shadows, daring, wakeful; too vigilant to be afraid, too absorbed in his task to be lonesome or to envy the regiments which faced the rain-storm of lead with massed bravery.

But the eleven miles of endless track tonight! Tonight he was alone. The guard vainly tried to cheer himself as he had cheered the patrol of other nights. Bulgaria had faced doughtily the main army of Islam; crushed it, too, mowed down the endless bodies of fezes like a poppy-field before the scythe; won single-handed the plains of Thrace the victory which assured freedom, not only to Bulgarian Macedonia, but to the Serb of Novibazar, to Greek Thessaly and far-away Crete.

But what availed valor where treachery slunk in the shadow, biding its hour to strike? Every thought of it made the railroad-guard sicken. Over the blood-sodden stretches of Tchatalja, of Tchorlu, of Lüle Burgas, the hordes of tyranny were sweeping back unchecked, and he paced the lonely track, the last sentinel of a hallowed ground. The rails no longer hummed the *Sheumi Maritza* march of freedom; try as he might to change their rhythm, over and over and over the rails buzzed Rashko's last words—

"*The last train, the last train, the last—the last—the last train!*"

He was a cog that had dropped from the machine; his twenty-two-mile round was a loose link from a chain which Destiny had dragged on westward. When the reckoning was taken at Seymen, he would be simply another "unaccounted for."

The bitter injustice of his situation sickened him. To be killed in battle—but to be just *lost!* Liubomir tried to believe that another train would come from Soflu. The idea mocked him. Why had not the lieutenant waited for the other train? Why had he blown out the lamp in the telegraph-office? They had all gone—he had only an endless stretch of abandoned rails to patrol.

What unaccountable sense of duty, what odd patriotism, *esprit de corps*, kept him to the deserted single track? The liberty of

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Thrace? He was, perhaps, her solitary defender. His soldier's honor? Bulgaria's command? The look in Vassil Christoff's eyes as he ordered him on duty harrowed his every step; yet they were the eyes through which militant Bulgaria looked at him, pitiless, exacter of unswerving loyalty. One star and one stripe, the lieutenant's command was law to the private.

The guard's loyal feet paced the ties of the single track, but his mind followed the speeding train toward Demotica, toward Adrianople, toward Seyman, Bulgaria. If Rashko did not reach Ladny Vir, what sort of stories would the village hear of his part in that night's work? Liubomir leaned his elbow on the butt of his rifle, digging its muzzle in the coal-slack of the track-bed, and gazed wistfully northward. The night stretched on, on, elusive—infinite— At the other end of it, Ladny Vir village was sleeping that moment a troubled sleep.

WAS Bogdana, too, asleep—and dreaming? If he took the path of the refugees, in five days he would be in Ladny Vir, telling his story of being left alone on duty, of—of deserting his post! He gripped his Mannlicher and paced grimly on; he could never tell her that story. He was under orders.

Telegraph - post after telegraph - post crawled behind him. In another half-hour he would reach the end of his eleven-mile stretch to the south, he would start back—and then?

Hurrying, reckless boot-nails clacked on the stones of the rough wagon-road crossing just ahead of him.

"Who goes?" he challenged.

A solitary figure dashed around the turn of the road and halted in front of the guard.

"Stancheff, special messenger from Soflu," the man answered. "Why, Liubomir! What are you doing here?"

"Patrolling the track until the next train comes up," Liubomir answered.

"The next train?" the courier shouted. "Every engine and car has gone up. Some of our men are on guard at Velibeik village. I am carrying them the command to leave at once. Come along."

"My orders are to patrol this track until the next train comes," Liubomir repeated with forced stolidity.

"Who gave them?"

"Lieutenant Vassil Christoff."

"Then he disobeyed orders higher up. Our colonel read the dispatch: 'Every man to leave the track by sundown.' The Turks may be here two hundred thousand strong by tomorrow morn——"

Hoofs clattered sharply from the direction of Velibeik. A squad of Anatolian cavalry galloped around the fringe of woods and closed about the two Bulgars.

"Search them," their gaunt, husky-voiced leader halloed. "Everything Turkish, strip off."

"Their epaulets," a rough Moslem sliced at Liubomir's shoulder-straps.

"Those leggings are mine!"

"But I keep the Mannlicher," the first man to jump from horseback slung Liubomir's rifle across his saddle.

With their sleeves half-torn from their coats, their caps and leggings gone, unarmed, helpless, the two railroad guards waited for the final thrust of the cavalrymen. Their officer looked his victims over contemptuously, then he slapped them with the broad-side of his sword.

"Now, you mighty conquerors of Thrace," he cried, "*psst!*"

He pointed to the ghostly shapes of birch and young poplars edging the track. The Bulgars neither reasoned nor hesitated. Groping in the dark, stumbling down the embankment, they dashed in among the bushes, northward bound. When they could no longer hear the horsemen's gallop, they stopped and looked in the direction of Velibeik village from which the cavalrymen had come. Had the Anatolian officer been as scornfully generous towards their four comrades there?

V

ABBOT CLEMENT'S hand trembled as he pulled the gong at Dontcho Ivanoff's gate. It was still early morning, but the old cleric was warm from his rapid walk down the mountain and the excitement of his visit. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead and listened for some one to come into the garden. No one came.

A sense of relief swept over the abbot; perhaps his mission would be hindered after all!

"Hindrance of Satan!" he muttered grimly and gave the bell a couple of savage pulls.

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He heard a door open in the house and light, quick steps crossing the courtyard. The latch lifted, Bogdana herself swung the heavy gate.

Her eyes opened wide in surprise as she saw the abbot; she gave a confused nod and courtesy.

"God give you greeting, Holy Father," she said. "Will you come in?"

He stepped past her into the high-walled garden, shaded by almonds and gnarled pear-trees. Half-way up the path to the white-plastered, red-tile-roofed house, he stopped.

"I am very sorry," Bogdana began, following after him on the gravel path, "but my father is in the fields and my mother has just gone to the market. You must have passed her——"

She expected him to turn back to the gate.

"You are all alone, then? It is well. I wanted to see you alone, Bogdana Ivanoff." He spoke haltingly, forcing his words. "Is there a place——"

"Let us go to the summer-house," she answered, "but first I must serve you, Holy Father Abbot."

She ran past him into the kitchen, and he turned to the roughly latticed arbor, backed against the high stone wall on the farther side of the garden, and roofed by heavy twisted grape-vines. Green clusters of fruit, turning blue on the sun side, hung plenteously among the leaves.

He watched Bogdana's lithe, supple gait as she came down the boxwood-bordered path, bearing the little guest-tray with its customary preserved cherries and glass of water. She was not beautiful, he thought, but the clear soft color of her cheeks, the upward curve to the corners of her lips, and the droop of the lids over eyes that laughed and tried to be demure, lent to her countenance a piquant charm that was better than beauty. She brimmed with health and life; sorrow had not touched her yet, and the old abbot sighed as he took her offering.

Bogdana wondered at the grief in his gloomy face. At his bidding she sat down, puzzled, and waited for him to speak. She had not known that Abbot Clement was even aware of her existence.

"Some forty years ago, as your father could tell you, my daughter," he began abruptly, "Ladny Vir was the center of a revolutionary district and the heart of the movement was Naiden Velkoff. An impetuous, firebrand spirit, he was a true son of the highlands, but we of Ladny Vir were a wary lot of plainsmen, fonder of chimney-places than of brigands' camp-fires. We girded our loins in cautious silence and saved our bullets for the day when all the Bulgars could strike a united blow against our Turkish oppressors. We saved our bullets, but we needed rifles and powder, and we had no money. Naiden Velkoff was resourceful; we chose him treasurer and fund-promoter.

"Among the village merchants a Greek, one Pericles Christos, flourished conspicuously with his business in tallow and oils. Born of a nomadic mother, he had wandered into Bulgarian Thrace and settled in Ladny Vir, but his soul remained alien to the hopes of the land on whose fat he thrived."

Bogdana started at the mention of the tallow merchant's name, and opened her lips to inquire. She had never known that Vassil's father was a Greek. But she checked herself and let the old man proceed. The abbot scarcely noticed her at all; he had fixed his eyes on an opposite post of the arbor, and he might have been reciting his story to the grape-vine leaves, or chanting a liturgic narrative, so little did he heed the maiden.

"Pericles housed a crafty soul, and he never outraged us by too great an intimacy with the Turkish guard of Ladny Vir, but he remained discreetly non-committal on the subject of freedom. Velkoff argued, coaxed, threatened him by turns, but Pericles closed his ears and his money-bags alike. And we of Ladny Vir did not countenance terrorism.

"One morning after he had not troubled the Greek for many months, Velkoff knocked at the door of the tallow-shop. He was starting on a business trip to Roumania, he told Pericles, and would be willing to take a load of tallow along to dispose of to a friend of his, who kept a large chandler shop in Bucharest. He wanted a twenty-five per cent. commission for his trouble.

"The idea amused Pericles.

" 'And when you are across the border with my tallow,' he said, 'how can I know I shall ever see your black eyes again?'

" 'You can't, of course,' Velkoff sniffed, 'but my father's wheat-fields and his house are here. They are not going with me—and

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if it comes to a suit, you are on much better terms with Ali Pasha of Philippopolis than I am.'

"Well, they argued the matter for the better part of the morning, and the next day Naiden Velkoff set out with his mule-loads of tallow and the promise of a fifteen per cent. commission.

"Somehow his business lagged in Roumania, but rifles began to arrive in Ladny Vir after dark, bullets and gunpowder kegs. When our committee met, we laughed at the patriotic metamorphosis Christos' tallow had undergone. And we hid the precious armament, blessing our absent fund-promoter.

"Eighteen hundred and seventy-six came and the April Revolution set Thrace afire, but it did not so much as singe the Sultan. The Maritza ran red with blood; smoke and ashes clouded Bulgaria's sun. Then Europe awoke and shuddered at the tales of our peasants massacred, hacked to pieces by Bashi-bazouks' yataghans. Gladstone hurled his philippics at the Sultan—'the Red Sultan,' he called him—and Alexander the Liberator 'listened to the voice of God speaking in his ear' and set the Russian legions in motion.

"The little brothers of the Czar did not find us callous to freedom. Not a Bulgar man flinched, and our blood flowed with that of the Russ on the broad Danube plain before Plevna. We from Ladny Vir were farther south, up among the crags above Shipka Pass, and Naiden Velkoff led our volunteers."

The old man's eyes burned, and hot blood tinged his white cheeks.

"What a fight it was, Bogdana!" he exclaimed, turning directly on the startled girl. "Time after time we blocked their way with their own corpses. But the Turkish hordes were countless, and at last our bullets gave out.

" 'Stones!' Naiden Velkoff shouted. 'Hurl the very mountainside itself upon them,' and we buried them in an avalanche of rocks and dirt and bodies of our fallen men.

"There it was, Bogdana, that your father lost his leg. A Turkish shell had hit him, and one of our men, thinking he was dead, rushed to grab him and hurl his body down at the Turks. But he was not dead and cried to Naiden. Velkoff ran to him, and the last drops from his water-bottle and whisky-flask saved your father's life.

"Oh, we fought like fiends, but we held them—held Suleyman Pasha's whole army back until Gurko's regiments could reach us. Then like a torrent the Russians swept over Thrace, and the eyes of mystic *mujiks* gazed on the leaden domes and gilded minarets of Constantinople."

The blood-glow faded from Clement's face and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"The rest we have never understood," he lamented. "In the long diplomatic wrangle at the Berlin Congress, piece after piece of the Bulgar homeland was handed about to this government and that. Our kinsmen in lower Thrace and Macedonia went once more into the Sultan's hands.

"But Ladny Vir was free, and the few of us whom the gods of war had pitied, a tattered, sun-coppered company, marched home; your father limping along on crutches. The whole village met us on the market-place to shower us with flowers, but as we broke from our ranks, Pericles Christos elbowed his way to Velkoff's side and whispered,

" 'Bring that tallow - money to my counting-room tomorrow.'

"Velkoff laughed aloud. 'Listen to him, men,' he called to us. 'He doesn't know his tallow melted into rifles and bullets for Ladny Vir.'

"We all shouted in joyous derision, and Pericles slunk away into his tallow-shop.

"That night was my last one in Ladny Vir for many months, for that night Ruja Dobreva plighted her troth to Naiden Velkoff. I found them together at her home when I went to ask her the same question."

Bogdana's wonder at the abbot's story grew at every moment. What could have sent him here, to her, to unearth all these buried secrets? Her eyes softened pityingly as she gazed at him. How must he have looked as a soldier, a lover, without his long, cord-girdled robe and black cylindrical hat? Her impatience for him to work out the mystery kept her silent to the end of the tale.

"WHAT became of me is of little consequence. I wandered about for many weeks and finally fell ill at a peasant village in the mountains. They took me to the Rilla monastery, and by the time I was well I had decided to become a monk. Homesickness sent me here, above

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Ladny Vir. When I returned I learned the rest of what I shall tell you.

"Velkoff's father and mother had died during the first uprising, and now Naiden took the old home and the fields. But Pericles had not forgotten his tallow, and he carried his suit to the courts.

"Naiden scoffed at the idea. He had been only an instrument in the hands of the revolutionary organization, the Provisional Government of Bulgaria, it had called itself. Every drop of that tallow had helped to arm a Bulgar patriot.

"But our country was young, and five hundred years of despotic anarchy had made impartial justice a fetish to the Bulgarian folk. Ladny Vir grew indignant, disgusted, but Bulgaria's justice pronounced an unambiguous verdict: Naiden Velkoff's lands and fields were confiscate to Pericles Christos, and if Naiden could not pay the rest in money, he must work at a fair wage for his creditor until the entire debt should be canceled.

"Velkoff's comrades crowded about him in front of the court-house, voicing their contempt for the verdict, pleading the youth of the judge and the certainty of a reversal of judgment at Philippopolis. But Naiden Velkoff would listen to nothing.

" 'Can you ever reverse this fact that in my own village a Bulgar court branded me as a noonday robber, because I used a greasy Greek's tallow to buy rifles for Ladny Vir?' he cried bitterly and pushed them away.

"The verdict was pronounced in the afternoon. That night he went to tell Ruja goodby. But she would not listen. They were married at midnight; before morning they had left Ladny Vir, fleeing on horseback across the Rhodope Mountains into Macedonia.

"For years after that, Naiden Velkoff's band of revolutionists baffled the Sultan's soldiery, but one morning in Midwinter, a trap they had laid for the Moslems closed about their own necks and the whole band was wiped out. The peasants in the village fled from the blood-drunken regiment of Bashi-bazouks that swept down upon them across the snow-packed trails to Bulgaria. Two of them, women, came to the Cloister of the Holy Cross; the younger one was Ruja, Naiden Velkoff's wife. Two days later her son was born and she died. We named the baby, Liubomir."

"Liubomir!" The name escaped Bogdana involuntarily.

The abbot smiled sadly.

"You understand now why I have told you the story?"

The girl flushed and shook her head.

"I do not know why," she murmured.

"Pericles Christos was a widower and childless. Had his business been local, Ladny Vir's indignation would have ruined him, but the foothold Velkoff had got for him in Roumania held after peace was signed, and Velkoff's wheat-fields helped him here. Still he needed more. Dorka, a carpenter's eldest daughter, had a fair dowry but an ill-favored face, and in her thirty-fifth year still wanted a husband. Pericles renounced his Greek parentage, Bulgarized his name to Christoff, and married Dorka.

"Time has strange powers, maiden. It washes out the saddest, bitterest memories. Ladny Vir forgot the story of Naiden Velkoff's tallow-deal; Pericles Christoff went out of his way to be neighborly. Your farms touch; he suggested their union, and the scheme did not displease your father. You have been bethrothed to Vassil since your babyhood."

"I know," Bogdana assented. A thousand chaotic thoughts clashed in her brain. One moment she hated Vassil and his dastard father, the next— After all, the abbot had fought with Liubomir's father; he loved Liubomir. Perhaps he was unjust to the tallow-merchant. Pericles had always been a good neighbor and she had played with Vassil since mud-pie days. But Liubomir! Eyes of shooting fire, deep, mystic eyes looked into her own. She could see the curved, sensitive lips smiling at her, too proud to beg and too shy to command. Suddenly she turned sharply on the abbot.

"Does Liubomir know this story?"

He reached out his hand toward her, the stern old face almost supplicating.

"I loved him," Clement pleaded. "He was all I had and I held him as Ruja's child. I was afraid to tell him of Naiden, afraid he would leave the cloister if he learned that a rebel hero had fathered him. He had much of his father's passionate intensity; I could not tell what course he might take. Then he met you. Only his dubious parentage could hold him back, keep him with me. Just before he went away, after the Holy Cross Festival, he begged me to tell him the story of his birth. I told him

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—very little, and he went away believing that the lieutenant's taunts were perhaps based on fact."

Bogdana's eyes blazed.

"You let him go to war without his true story, believing a lie?" she challenged hotly.

"He may be the son of a passing Turk for all he himself knows."

"Then why have you told it to me?" the girl demanded scornfully. "Are you not afraid I shall tell him?"

The old man bowed his head.

"I am not afraid—I wish I could be," he said in a low voice. "You know where he was stationed, with Lieutenant Vassil in southern Thrace. The Turks advanced on them, the men all along the line were ordered to shift for themselves.

"Last night a soldier, Stancheff by name, passed through and stopped at the cloister. He was from another company, but he and Liubomir had barely escaped being killed by a troop of Turkish horsemen. They fled through Thrace with a band of refugees, fought their way across the mountains, harassed by Greek *andartes* night and day, menaced at every turn by raiding Bashi-bazouks.

"At one Greek village which they had to cross, the natives, armed with rifles which the Sofia Government had given them last Fall to afford them protection from Turkish irregulars, came out and tried to shoot down the refugees. Liubomir's band made for the woods, but one lad of ten lost his head and started to hide in a side street. The mother begged some one to save him. Liubomir went. The soldier Stancheff said he saw Liuby fall just as he turned the corner of the side street. They did not dare to look for him and the lad, but fled on.

"All night, whenever I closed my eyes, Naiden Velkoff came to accuse me, Ruja rose up to condemn me, to scorn my lie to her boy. By this morning I could endure the travail of my spirit no longer. He loved you. My falsehood kept him from telling you so. Now he can never tell you. I must do it for him. God forgive me."

The old abbot crossed himself humbly, rose, and laid his hand on the girl's head.

"You will marry Vassil Christoff," he said, "and it is well. Liuby will not be lonely in his manhood as I have been lonely."

He stopped abruptly, and without a word of parting walked through the garden and away. Bogdana looked after him, stupefied by the conclusion of his story. When the heavy gate banged behind him, she sank down on the garden, clutching the edge with trembling fingers.

"Liubomir," she whispered. "*Liuby!*"

Over the top of the wall that separated the Ivanoff yard from that of Pericles Christoff, just above the grape-vine leaves of the summer-house, the sleek face of the tallow-merchant glared vindictive rage at the back of the abbot. When the gates closed behind old Clement, he pushed the grape leaves noiselessly aside and peered down at the girl lying with covered face on the bench.

"Liuby!" he heard the faint whisper.

Pericles let himself down from the wall to the chair he had propped against it, and stepped into the soft earth of his rose-bed. Without the rattle of a pebble, he lifted the chair away, picked up the small garden spade he had been using around his rose-bushes when the name of Naiden Velkoff, uttered on the other side of the wall, had caught his ear, and went softly to the house, walking on the flower-beds to prevent crunching the gravel on the path.

"Move nimbly, Pericles!" he muttered.

VI

BEHIND the tightly closed, heavily curtained windows of Pericles Christoff's counting-room, three men and the tallow-merchant were engrossed in an excited half-whispered discussion. Several times before he had let them begin, Pericles had unlocked the heavy door, stepped to the hall and out of the house, to make sure he was not spied upon.

"Don't admit any one this afternoon, Katka," he ordered the serving-woman. "I shall be very busy and want to see no one. *No one*, mind," he finished sternly.

"I hear, master." Katka lifted her red arm as muscular as a blacksmith's. "No one gets by this fist."

Pericles went back to his counting-room and locked the door behind him.

"*Ssst!*" he hushed the man who was anxious to begin, took the huge key from the lock, and listened at the keyhole. The house was still. Dorka was spending the afternoon at her father's house; Katka in the garden sang a peasant harvest-song in weird plaintive minors as she hung out the washing.

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Reassured, Christoff sat at the end of the table nearest the door, dangling the key on his little finger, and looked sharply at his three fellow Greeks.

"The other day I didn't think I cared to go into this business," he began in a low voice, "but I've thought it over since then and I've changed my mind."

"It's the grandest, easiest scheme you can imagine," the man at the opposite end of the table burst out and stretched an oily finger at the tallow-merchant.

He was brief of figure but long-mouthed, rather puffy in the face, with dark, fiery eyes. Bulgaria had sent all her sons to the front; Costi, the baker, claimed Greece as his birthplace, and remained in the village to help himself from the dishes Ladny Vir wives sent to the public oven left in his charge by a Bulgar gone to war, and to weave plots against the land which fed him. In the after-dark conclaves of the half-dozen neo-Hellenes of Ladny Vir, he was the unquestioned chairman, for he possessed gifts of speech and a contagious enthusiasm.

"There are two or three or a dozen sons of Hellas in most every Bulgar town and village. But two or three will suffice to do this work. Now is the accepted time," he spoke fervently, "King Constantine presses his triumphant advance from the southwest, the Rumanians have northern Bulgaria at their mercy, and Enver Bey's thousands are ready to cross the old border any time, tonight maybe. These Bulgar sheep-heads were never so helpless as now, and we Hellenes, glorious sons of a glorious mother——"

"Don't talk like a dunderpate Athenian, Costi!" Pericles cut him short. "What you say may be true in the large; it won't be the fault of those ninnyhammer diplomats in Sofia if it isn't, the way they've trusted Russia——"

"And armed the Greek villages in Turkish Thrace," Costi laughed in derision. "Catch Greece arming the Bulgars in the territory she takes!"

"Still, Costi, as I said, don't be a beetle-head. King Constantine isn't visible yet in these parts, and Enver Bey isn't going any farther than he has gone. England is already crying stop."

"England is always crying stop," Costi sniffed.

"Just the same, Costi," Pericles shrugged his shoulders conservatively, "just the same it is easier to be a victorious general in your bakery than in some other places. Bulgar dolts can fight like devils when they have to."

"Yes, silly devils. Why——"

"Now quit interrupting me, baker. I know the Bulgar soldier somewhat better than you know the Greek—but let that pass. What I want to tell you is this: Don't be a giddy. Be like Venizelos, keep on the safe side, let the other fellow do the fighting. As far as I can see, my side is safe enough, and I have my own reasons for going into this business, which don't matter to you. So then what do you propose to do and when can you start it?"

"It can be all over tonight, Pericles," Costi said eagerly, looking around at his companion, "if we can get a half-dozen horses. Stavros here will use his own and Spiro can find another. If we could have two of yours—nobody will ever guess how we got them. Just turn them loose into the pasture and we'll manage the rest. The Turkish prisoners are just waiting for our signal, aren't they, Spiro?" he turned to the sticky-faced vendor of sweets.

Spiro nodded.

"Every son of Allah that is in the camp. The commandant has ordered a half-dozen more guards around the prisoners' shacks since Turkey boiled over again, but they are raw fellows, almost schoolboys."

"All we have to do is to deck ourselves in some old soldier's uniforms which you can procure for us, Christos, race through the streets after sundown when no one can recognize us and yell 'Turks are coming!' Ladny Vir will spill itself out to see what's what, there will be a row, the guards at the prisoners' camp will rush over here to find out what's the matter, the Turks over there will get loose, and——"

COSTI suddenly checked his flow of eloquence. Pericles sprang for the door; Spiro ducked under the table; while Stavros simply stared, his tongue protruding from his mouth. In the open door Vassil stood, curiously taking stock of the Greek cabal.

"You fools!" he hissed at them. "You mule-pated clodpolls, you moon-calves! Planning the ruin of us all for some ninny baker's dream!"

Pericles grabbed his son by the arm and

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pushed him out into the hall. The door closed behind them.

"How did you get here today, Vassil? I have been sort of expecting you all the week. And how did you open the door?" he gasped.

Vassil laughed in contempt.

"A regiment could have marched up and down this corridor without your hearing them above your chatter. When Katka tried to keep me from seeing my own paternal ancestor, I thought it was high time I looked in on you unsuspected. Was afraid you might be making your will, and that's pretty much my business, you know. I happened to remember where you kept another key to the counting-room, so it was play to walk inside when I got ready!

"It is a blessing I found you just in time," he concluded. "Are you out of your wits, father, to go in with those." He spat in the direction of the counting-room.

"Be still, Vassil," Pericles urged. "My scheme is my own. The uprising is planned, I can not stop it, and you shall not, if you remain my son. Besides we need it for our own plans."

He pushed Vassil farther from the door and pressed his hand against his son's chest to hold him quiet.

"Bogdana Ivanoff will never marry you unless we act quickly—force her to do it. Hawk-beaked old Clement from the monastery has told her the history of Naiden Velkoff. Understand? Her sympathies are all stirred up; she was half in love with the schoolmaster already."

"But he is surely dead." Vassil hoped he was not mistaken.

"I know," Pericles answered, "the abbot heard so, and that is why he told her. But because she can't marry him dead is no reason why she should want to marry you alive. And remember old Ivanoff has more *uvrats* of rich Thracian land than any man in Ladny Vir, and many a pretty yellow *lira* stored away where the rats can't get at them. Every *stotinka* he has goes to wavy-hair Bogdana."

Vassil scowled.

"All the more reason why you should keep your hands out of this Greek mess," he retorted. "Bogdana has nothing to do with that."

Pericles chuckled at his own cleverness.

"Nothing to do, my son!" he exclaimed. "Leave her to me. Ladny Vir will be in a deuce of an uproar. What if Bogdana is caught on the street and I save her? Ivanoff will lick my shoes in gratitude. Then you rush in to rescue us all from a Turkish raid and, under protection of your uniform, take us to a place of safety—on condition that Bogdana becomes your wife. You can't save just a *friend* and her parents, you know."

"You're a crafty old drake!" Vassil admitted, thinking rapidly. "But let me save the girl. I'll stand a much better show with her then."

"Not a bit," Pericles remonstrated, "and you must not be in the streets at all. Don't show yourself about. Go to bed. Otherwise your business as a lieutenant will be fighting the riot, not making love to any village girl. But be sure you are at Ivanoff's house by the time I arrive with Bogdana."

"You may trust me to be on hand for the rescued lady," Vassil laughed. "But, father, take care not to get into that plot too deeply. Some one may blab."

"Trust me," Pericles reassured him. "No one thinks of us as Greeks, you know."

Vassil watched his father step back softly into his private room and lock the door, leaving the key in the lock.

"The old man's advice to me is good enough anyway," he yawned. "Go to bed. What a mess it has been, refugees everywhere, asking fool questions, begging your last bite of bread. And no sleep— Katka," he called to the servant, "bring me something to eat—a singed rooster, anything! And hurry up about it; I want to go to sleep."

VII

THE temporary camp for the Turkish prisoners assigned to Ladny Vir was in a small meadow just outside the old Turkish section of the large village. Only the poorest of Ladny Vir's peasants lived in the unsteady, ramshackle huts, where the overhanging, latticed windows, harem-shields of former years, leaned over the narrow streets and dropped crumbling plaster on to the heads of heedless passers-by. Rain crept through if sunshine could not, and muddy rivulets that never quite dried out kept the round mossy cobblestones slippery footing for booted heels.

The camp itself was composed of one

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large shack, where the prisoners gathered for their meals and some of them slept, and three or four smaller ones, sleeping-quarters for the rest. A heavily barbed wire-fence, six feet high, enclosed the camp, and day and night Bulgar guards paced up and down outside the wire.

During the day only the laziest of the Turks sprawled about on the grass of their outdoor prison, but the more energetic Moslems, willing to add to the franc-a-day allowed them by the Bulgarian government, scattered into the rice-fields and returned in the evening jingling their three francs in their pockets. By dark every prisoner had to be safely housed, and by eight the captured Turkish officers, who were held responsible for the reappearance of the privates, were under close guard in a near-by tavern.

Across the broad sun-baked highway that led south and east from Ladny Vir, and not too far away for a bugle-call to reach the sentry there, lay the long, low, whitewashed barracks where the young lads called to the colors drilled and slept.

The last purplish-blue streaks of sunshine tinted the bald, gray rocks above the Cloister of the Holy Cross, and dusk was settling over the flat, yellow fields of the Maritza valley, when a soldier and a tattered, famished-looking boy of ten trudged through the white sandy dust of the highway leading up to Ladny Vir.

"Is it far now, Master Liuby?" the weary little voice begged. "Is Ladny Vir far from here?"

"Right ahead of you, sonny," Liubomir tried to cheer him up. "See those yellow lights popping out? Those are in the market-place. You'll have plenty to eat before you go to sleep tonight."

The boy sighed hungrily and pulled himself along.

Capless, unshaven, his clothes mud-bespattered and torn, Ladny Vir's former schoolmaster was a sad memory of a soldier as he tramped back home. One sleeve of his clay-brown coat was pinned to his shoulder by an acacia thorn, the other hung in shreds. From his knees down to his shoes, where victorious Bulgaria had for months worn Turkish leggings, his trouser-legs were riddled by underbrush and caked with mud. The leather above the heel of one shoe had ripped and the loose heel flopped in the dust as he walked.

The pair had reached the low shacks of the Turkish prison and were passing on the opposite side of the road under the row of poplars that lined the approach to the village. Liubomir wondered whether he should spend the night at Rashko Tosheff's house. In the morning he could take the lad up to the monastery and leave him in care of Father Clement until his mother could be found. He had just decided to push on to Rashko's when . . .

"*Sst!*" He shoved the boy behind a tree and crowded into the shadow beside him. The lad's teeth chattered with fright, but his past week's experiences had taught the ten-year-old a man's control, and not even a grass-blade rustled. Only his round, terrified eyes fixed themselves on Liubomir's face. The soldier's whole attention was riveted across the road on the shack farthest from the entrance.

The guard was just changing. Seeing the country behind them free in every direction, the ones at the rear of the camp had not waited at their posts for their release, but had walked to the front of the camp and met the new sentinels there. For five minutes the rear fence was entirely unguarded.

Liubomir strained his eyes to see the two men crawling from the rear of the shack through the long grass toward the unguarded wires. The one to reach them first raised his head cautiously and looked around. Then he motioned for his companion to follow. At one of the heavy wooden posts that supported the network of wires, the men pulled out some spikes that had evidently been loosened before and raised the network of barbs just enough to allow their bodies to wriggle under. Even on the outside of the fence they continued their slow crawl until they were behind a thick, knotty poplar trunk, almost opposite to the one where Liubomir stood.

The soldier cocked his rifle, ready for action should they take the road to the east.

Scrambling quickly to their feet, however, the two men crossed the road and turned toward Ladny Vir. For one moment Liubomir caught full sight of their faces.

"Slavy," Liubomir clasped the boy's arm, "those men are the meanest Greek scamps in Ladny Vir. We must dog them and find out what they are up to."

Slavy's eyes glowed with excitement.

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"All right, Master Liuby."

Hugging the shadows, the two ran noiselessly over the grass and reached the edge of the village just in time to note the narrow black alley into which the two men turned.

Several times Liubomir and the boy who crowded on his heels had to dart into a doorway as the pair ahead of them wheeled about to make sure they were not followed. The soldier dared not lose sight of them an instant and strained his ears to catch snatches of their conversation. But the Greeks saw no one and trotted on, alert but unafraid. Not a man knew the crooks and turns of the old Turkish quarter as well as Costi, the baker, and his brother Spiro.

They had turned a corner and were going down a sharp decline at a run, their soft, buffalo-hide sandals clinging as easily to the oozy rocks as Slavy's bare feet; but Liubomir's shoes with the floppy heel afforded too noisy and insecure a foothold. A nail in the heel clacked sharply against a stone.

Costi whirled about, and Liubomir sprang under a sagging balcony. But the wet soles slipped on a mossy stone. The soldier lost his balance, and fell against the corner of a doorstep. His rifle flew from his hand.

"Followed," Costi yapped. Spiro stood for a moment fear-transfixed, but their pursuer did not move. Costi looked closer.

"He's all alone," he cried jubilantly, "and he has hurt himself. Come back."

The two Greeks started toward the fallen man.

Crawling on his empty stomach, Slavy pressed his little body against the paving stones and reached out a trembling hand for Liubomir's rifle. He drew it to him noiselessly and crept, roach-like, into a crack between two houses. If he only dared to fire!

But his little fingers trembled as he touched the trigger and he drew them away. After all he might miss. Then the Greeks would kill him, too. He huddled in his hiding-place and waited.

Costi dragged the soldier into the middle of the street and pressed his face close to that of his victim.

"By my bushy chin-whiskers!" the baker exclaimed. "He is that milksop schoolmaster from the monastery."

"But Pericles said the schoolmaster was dead!" Spiro's scalp bristled creepily.

Suddenly Liubomir's fist shot upward and caught Costi's nose. The baker staggered but held his grip.

"Maybe he was," he yawped, stuffing a dirty handkerchief into Liubomir's mouth, "but he ain't now."

The blood spurted from the Greek's nose and over his greasy shirt.

"Come here, you lop-eared rabbit," he snarled at Spiro. "Help me tie him up."

Liubomir struggled desperately to throw off his captors, rolling and tumbling over the stones. But the brothers held him fast.

"Tie his heels, can't you?" Costi cried. "I have his hands fast."

Spiro tore off his long woolen sash and wound it around and around Liubomir's legs, knotting it hard about the ankles.

"Where shall we dump him?" growled Costi.

"Yorgi's cellar will do," Spiro suggested. "Nobody lives over it now. Has a dirt floor too—easy to dig in."

"Give a lift then."

The two men raised their burden to their shoulders and turned into a near-by hut, its cellar steps opening on to the street. Costi, who was ahead, unbolted the door and pushed his way into the cellar, noisome with decayed fruit, garlic and vegetables. A bat flew out, flopping into Spiro's face.

"Hey, strike a match, Costi!" the sweetsvender bawled. "No telling what we may light on in this hole."

"And set the old tinder-box afire," Costi scoffed. "Let the baggage down. We're far enough in."

They propped him against a post that supported the floor above. Costi heaved a sigh of relief.

"He is no grasshopper in heft," he commented, rubbing his shoulder, and sat down on the dirt floor to rest a moment. "We must be getting off, Spiro. It's a pretty jaunt yet to Pericles's pasture where he said he would leave the horses. You haven't attached yourself to the saddler's nag yet, and we must go by the tallow-shop for the soldier-uniforms, you know. The Turks said they'd start their riot the moment they heard us give the alarm."

"But, Costi," Spiro queried, "how did this lizard get started crawling after us—without a rifle, too?"

"I am not going to take that rag out of his mouth to let him tell us," Costi answered. "He's probably sneaked up from Thrace alone. Let's leave him here now. He can't squeal."

"He might wriggle loose somehow," Spiro

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worried. "And he has my sash. Let's just pick out his eyes anyhow. Then he can wriggle to his heart's content."

"No, no, come along." Costi was already outside. "We've killed overmuch time already."

But Spiro clutched greedily at Liubomir's face. The Bulgar lunged backward from the gaunt claw, missed the post, and fell to the packed dirt floor.

Spiro laughed, kicked him contemptuously with the toe of his sandal, and followed his brother. Liubomir heard them drop the heavy bolt into its socket.

VIII

SOMEWHERE a rat squealed, a colony of bats flopped about in a corner and flew in and out of a high narrow window where the glass had been broken. The fetid odor from the garbage around him nauseated Liubomir, already half-stifled by Costi's dirty handkerchief, tied across his mouth.

He raised himself until he could sit up and leaned the side of his head against the rough post. He could not hear a sound except the restless housekeeping of his cellarmates. He tried to rub his face against his shoulder and pull off the gag, but the Greek had done his work well. Anyway, it didn't matter. Cries would probably only bring a set of rascals as bad as those who had left him. No respectable citizen of Ladny Vir explored the abandoned Turkish quarter after nightfall.

What had become of Slavy, however? He must have skipped away unnoticed and he might bring help. But Slavy was a simple child, and even if he could find any one who would believe his story, he would never be able to guide him to this hole. And besides, there was the plot!

Liubomir sat up, thinking hard. He tried to patch a meaning out of the fragmentary conversation of his captors: Pericles's horses in the pasture, Turks ready to start the riot as they had heard the alarm. It took little ingenuity to grasp the conspiracy: Liubomir had been dealing with bands of Greek *andartes* too intimately not to understand what Costi was about.

"And Vassil Christoff, lieutenant in the Bulgarian Army, perhaps he is in with them!"

Liubomir's brain reeled as he contemplated the betrayal, the danger to Ladny Vir, perhaps to— He dared not think of Bogdana. The soldier tore his wrists, wriggled his ankles, straining at his bands.

"God!" he groaned. "Am I really the only one who knows?"

"Master Liuby!"

He started at the faint whisper of the call. The place was deathly still; his imagination must have deceived him.

"Master Liubomir, are you still down there?"

The words came from directly over his head. Liubomir looked up at the rough boards that obviously formed the floor of the house above him, but he could see nothing in the darkness. He thought, however, that he distinguished Slavy's short, gasping breathing.

"Ummm," he moaned through the bandage. He was trying to say, "I am bound."

"Alone?" the lad asked again.

"*Um!*" Liubomir grunted vigorously through his nose.

He heard padded footsteps sneaking about on the floor, then Slavy's little kicks and tugs, as if he were lifting or trying to move something. Liubomir turned his head to one side, and a faint glimmer of light met his eyes from the floor above. Slavy let himself warily through the trap-door and felt his way step by step into the cellar, dragging something heavy after him.

"Where are you, master?" he called, his thin little voice shaking uncertainly. "Grunt again."

"Here," Liubomir tried to say.

Creeping to him, the boy threw his arms around his neck, half beside himself at finding his savior.

"And oh, see," he exulted, "your rifle, too. I saved it. I can cut you all loose with the bayonet, master."

The lad felt carefully for the rag over the man's face and ripped it away. Then he slashed at the cords around his wrists, so excitedly that he cut him slightly. Liubomir tore off the heavy sash at his feet and sprang up, shaking himself free.

"Slavy, you little—you little frog!" he cried, rubbing the child's cold hands. "How did you ever find me?"

"I just followed them," Slavy answered proudly. "While they were down here, I crept into the house above. It's empty and so old I was afraid they'd hear the boards

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creaking. Then I waited—hours—to make sure they were gone."

Hours! In the first flush of his freedom Liubomir had almost forgotten the night's plot. Now he slung the rifle-strap across his shoulder.

"We must be off at once, Slavy. No telling how much of a start these rascals have on us by this time."

THEY crept up the stairs and out to the street. Once away from the dark, filthy alleys, they came into the broader streets of the Bulgarian section, where occasional petroleum street-lamps flickered at the corners. Beyond was the down-town of the village, where the commandant made his headquarters.

The streets were alive with people, cooling off after the day's heat. Neighbors called to each other from their doorsteps or stopped the passing refugees to learn any new tale of the Turkish advance or Roumania's raid into the Danubian plain to the north.

"You can believe me, friend," a fugitive from Nikopol, on the Danube, hobnobbed with a refugee from the shores of the Ægean Sea, "King Carol's corn-mush-eaters know that Bulgaria hasn't got a soldier left to send against them, they won't stop till they shake hands with Enver Bey's bashi-bazouks. It is a regular conspiracy to shut us up on all sides. The postmaster here at Ladny Vir told me today not a letter or newspaper can squeeze in or out. The Danube boats don't run any more and Russia won't let a cable slip through Odessa."

"I met a family of Greeks at the Kayadjik station the other day," the man from southern Thrace added, "running away from the Turks. I asked them how they dared to seek refuge in Bulgaria, when the Greeks were killing Bulgars right and left across the border. The father grinned at me. Said he guessed they would pull through somehow. They were riding on the train free of charge and getting their bread every day, the same as any of us Bulgars."

Snatches of other conversations reached Liubomir's ears as he dragged Slavy's worn little figure after him and hurried along. And all concerning the same topic. Over and over it was bandied about—some men were bitter, others sought for excuses, and a scattered few were still hopeful. At any rate, the army, fighting for life and death against the attack of its allies, and helpless to repel the Roumanian and Turkish invasions, was the same army that had thrashed the Sultan's regiments and tossed them like chaff before it from Kirk Kilisseh to Tchataljа.

The sharp beat of horses' hoofs clattered into the street ahead. Liubomir let go the boy's hand and dashed forward recklessly. He must reach that corner before the horsemen passed it.

But he was still a hundred paces from the turning when they came into view, checked their gallop for a moment's excited conversation, then separated, each one dashing in a different direction. One of the riders was coming directly toward Liubomir.

Suddenly he raised himself in his saddle: Liubomir started as he recognized the swarthy face. In the uncertain light of the street-lamps, the Greek baker looked for all the world like a soldier. His uniform was that of a private, but he wore a lieutenant's old cap.

"Turks! Turks are coming!" Costi yelled at the top of his voice. "Run—Turks——"

A rifle-shot cut short the second alarm. Costi toppled over onto the pavement.

"Slavy." Liubomir snatched the reins and jerked the horse aside. "Run as fast as you can to Rashko Tosheff's house over yonder." He waved his hand in a general direction. "Wait for me there."

He leaped ahorse and galloped toward the commandant's quarters. Rifle-shots cracked right and left. In the direction of the prisoners' camp scattered volleys mixed with blood-curdling yells.

At the steps of the commandant's headquarters, Liubomir jerked his frothing horse to a standstill and sprang to the cobblestones just as the commandant himself rushed down the steps.

"The Greeks, sir!" the soldier cried. "They've incited the prisoners to riot, armed some of them. The whole place is in revolt!"

"God!" the Commandant gasped. "Have we been sleeping?" He whirled to his secretary, who stood pale in the doorway.

"Summon every man in the garrison out at once," he commanded. "Give orders to shoot rioters at sight."

He snatched the reins of the horse from Liubomir's hands and dashed away in the direction of the prisoners' camp.

The heavy firing was already dying down when Liubomir reached the market-square

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and turned down the road toward the captives' shacks. He tried to hurry, but his feet were weary and the crowding, frightened villagers blocked his passage. Some of them recognized their former schoolmaster and showered questions at him. He answered them briefly, trying to quiet their alarm, and pushed on.

"By my shoulder-straps! Liubomir!" Rashko Tosheff darted from the street and grabbed his arm. "Are you dead or alive?"

"More dead than alive, Rashko. But this is no place to talk. Come along to the prisoners' camp."

"It is quieting down, we're not needed. Those young chaps from the barracks showed their mettle tonight, and every rioting prisoner that isn't dead now is cowering on his grass-blade, waiting for tomorrow. The poor devils! It'll be quick work, but mighty nasty business."

"Are you going home?"

"Yes, come with me. I'd just got through the family to the dining-table when I heard a shot. Half a dozen more, and hell broke loose. I thought it was time for me to be reporting for duty. Who in thunder stirred all this up, Liubomir? The commandant is going to begin the investigation tonight."

IX

BOGDANA sat on a bench under the pear-tree, fanning her hot face, waiting for her mother's return from the village. It was dusk and since early morning she had been in Ladny Vir's hospital where the refugees who were too sick or exhausted to endure camp-life had found shelter and care. Her mother had gone out in the afternoon to distribute old clothes and bedding.

"And Liuby's mother, too, was like these poor women," the girl whispered as she thought of the wild-eyed, disheveled mothers with their grimy, bawling children.

All the night before, Bogdana had lain in her little white-plastered room and stared out at the stars, pondering Abbot Clement's story. Hour after hour she followed Naiden Velkoff scouring the country for stray piasters, mortgaging his meadow-lands for the Greek's tallow to buy rifles, bullets, freedom for Bulgaria; urging his little band of volunteers on the crags above Shipka Pass, saving her own father's life, fighting all the way down to Constantinople, and returning in triumph to Ladny Vir—to be haled before the courts as a robber!

Again and again her fancy imaged the defiant flight from Ladny Vir; the tempest-tossed years in the brigand highlands of Macedonia. And always, in every picture, Bogdana saw, not Naiden Velkoff, but Liubomir. The massacre—her fancy dared not go further. She shuddered and could not imagine Liubomir dead.

When day broke, Bogdana fell into an exhausted, dreamless sleep, and her mother had to call her three times before she wakened.

The girl had coaxed her father into the garden and told him the old priest's story. She had to tell some one, and she was sure he would notice nothing unusual in her own interest. Her mother had a keener eye and Bogdana wanted to avoid confessions. The wooden-legged veteran of Shipka stumped back and forth on the gravel, too much roused over the conclusion of the tale to suspect his daughter's own relation to it.

"So that is why Ivan turned pious," Dontcho Ivanoff muttered. "He was always a bookish lad, and I didn't dream—Suppose he was afraid some of us would want the boy if he let us know. What a pity I was away from home when he came yesterday to tell me."

Bogdana smiled even yet when she thought how easily she had imposed on her father, but her lips trembled over the smile, and the brown eyes grew misty. If her father only knew!

The garden-gate shook with the force of the body that pushed it open. A small ragged urchin ran into the garden.

"Bogdana Ivanoff, are you here?" he panted.

"What is it, boy," the girl asked. "Here I am."

"Your father, Mr. Dontcho Ivanoff—sun's struck him!"

She grabbed the youngster by his greasy coat-sleeve. She knew her father had planned to work in his rice-fields that afternoon away on the other side of town.

"Where is he now?"

"Over there," the boy pointed, "in his field—clean past the barracks. And he's a-calling for you."

Bogdana did not even tell the little servant-girl where she was going. Brushing the boy aside she rushed out of the garden and down the street. It was a long way to

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the rice-fields. What if her father could not hold out?

People stared and shook their heads to see wavy-haired Bogdana racing bareheaded across the market-square. Some tried to stop her, but she paid no heed. Bogdana had just one thought—to reach her father.

She decided to follow the highway and cut across the meadows behind the barracks. It would save ten minutes at least. The girl did not notice that the light in the streets was from the lamps, while the twilight of approaching night was over the fields.

She had just reached the open place before the prisoners' camp and started past, when a bedlam of cries from the village brought her to a quick stop.

"Turks! Turks are coming!"

Almost at the same instant she heard the sharp crack of a rifle—several others. She whirled about, and stood rooted with terror.

Yelling, armed with chairs, table-legs, stones, some of them with rifles, the Turkish prisoners stormed from their shacks and rushed upon the guards. A sharp bugle called from the front of the camp, answered almost instantly from the barracks, and then the guards fired. The prisoners hurled themselves recklessly against the wire fence, crawling under, trying to climb over the heavy network of barbs, clubbing at the soldiers, too close to be shot down. And the tumult in the village grew at every moment.

Suddenly, behind her, Bogdana heard a crowd of running feet and bullets whistled about her ears. The soldiers from the garrison were rushing toward the camp. The Turks answered; bullets played with bullets across the highway. Bewildered, Bogdana did not know which way to run. The mob in front and the troops behind were closing all about her; a bullet whizzed through her skirt.

"*Na noshl* Bayonet them!" she heard an officer command.

A horseman raced up the road to the girl, leaned over, and swung her on to his saddle.

"Bogdana," Pericles cried in consternation, "whatever has brought you here, my girl?"

Bogdana clung to his neck, breathless, gasping, struggling to collect her wits. Pericles turned his horse into a quieter side-street and slowed it down.

"How lucky it is that I happened to be in this end of the village, and galloped down to the riot. Even an old man counts in a time like this, you know," Pericles added. "Then all at once I saw you standing there. It fairly froze my heart, child. Any moment you might have met your death!

" 'If only Vassil were here,' I thought, 'he would rush in and save her.' An old bones like me is uncertain. Still—I could ride once upon a time. And as for bullets—a man doesn't feel bullets when a maid like you is in danger."

He held her closely.

"You are so good—and brave, Mr. Pericles," Bogdana murmured gratefully. "I couldn't think—every direction was cut off. Wasn't it lucky the order to charge with bayonets was given just before you came and saw me. There was scarcely any shooting at all then."

Pericles bit his lip, but the girl was evidently sincere.

"I—and Vassil too, child—would brave the Adrianople siege-guns to save *you*. But whither were you skipping? What is Dontcho thinking of to let you go out there alone at such a time of night?"

"Oh, my father!" Bogdana cried, jerking the horse's head about. "Take me to the farthest rice-field, Mr. Pericles. My father has been sunstruck and I must go. He may already be dead."

The tallow-merchant took her hand from the rein.

"Your father sunstruck?" he queried. "Why, I saw him going home to supper myself not half an hour ago. You would have met him had you taken the usual road."

"Then why did that boy call me?" Bogdana wondered.

"Some one called you, Bogdana, at this time of night—'way out there?" Pericles shook his head knowingly. "Bless me to your latest hour! Some one was deceiving you, maid, luring you away to your destruction. You need a defender, Bogdana."

The girl stared at him, her eyes round, wondering, terror-filled.

"But who—why—" she questioned.

Pericles spurred his horse to a gallop.

"Vassil will be wild," he cried. "I forgot to tell you he came home today—late—so exhausted we made him go straight to bed. But he'll be up by this time, and his first thought in this riot will be of Bogdana."

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Pericles gnashed his teeth profusely.

"It'll be a sorry day when Vassil finds out who lured you away this night. Just hold on to my neck, Bogdana. I love you like my own daughter, child."

Bogdana put her arms on his shoulders to keep from falling. A double wave of gratitude to this man swept over her. He must have saved her from a fate worse than a hundred deaths.

X

SUPPER was ready and waiting. For the third time Yana Ivanoff went to the window and looked across the garden fence into the street.

"I don't understand what is keeping Bogdana so late tonight," she worried. "I expected to find her home when I got here. What's that? Dontcho, what's that?"

A rifle-shot echoed from the farther end of the village, followed by a confused hubbub of cries. Dontcho laid his three-days-old Sofia paper on the supper-table, took his spectacles from his nose, and put them in their case.

"Those refugees' stories have made you as nervous as a hare, Yana," he rebuked her. "With every vacant lot full of all sorts of fugitives, a little uproar now and then isn't anything. As for Bogdana——"

Scattered shots interrupted him. The outcry in the village grew louder every minute.

"Marika," Yana leaned from the window, calling the little servant girl, "Marika, didn't Bogdana send any word home this evening at all?"

"Haven't seen a soul pass that gate," Marika shook her head mystified, "not since I heard Bogdana talking to some one here, just before you came in. She ran off without saying——"

"She has been home?"

"Just a little while, then some one called and she went away in a big hurry."

"I told you not to worry," said Dontcho satisfied. "I saw Pericles in the street on my way home and he said they were expecting Vassil tonight. Rashko has probably come and Petka called her to see him."

But Yana still puckered her face anxiously.

"I'll run over to Tosheff's and find out," she said, snatching up a light shawl. "I don't like that noise over in the village."

Dontcho went to an upper window and strained his eyes in the direction of the uproar.

"If I weren't such a slow old carcass, and part of me gone!"

A volley of shots tore the night, answered by another and another. Dontcho could see the white powder-smoke over the housetops.

"Bless my buttons, it's a regular battle!" he cried. "I'd better take my gun and find out what is the trouble."

He stumped down the stairs.

"Dontcho," Yana's shrill voice called, "Bogdana isn't at Petka's. They haven't seen anything of her. Rashko is home, but at the first shot he grabbed his rifle and ran. Petka says the prisoners are loose and fighting—the Greeks, too."

Dontcho almost fell at the last step.

"I'll go hunt her!"

He brushed past his wife and both of them ran to the door. Just at the threshold Vassil and his mother met them.

"Is father here?" Vassil asked anxiously. "Something has broken loose on the other side of town, and he has been over there all afternoon on business. He hoped he might have come back with you, Mr. Ivanoff."

"He didn't." Dontcho's bronzed face whitened. "And Bogdana too is gone—we don't know where."

Yana wrung her hands helplessly.

"An old woman told me this afternoon the Turks would never stop this side of Sofia. They must be here! Why didn't you listen to me, Dontcho, and go to Sofia when we could!"

"It will be all right, Mrs. Ivanoff," Vassil interrupted her wailing. "I'll go into the village now and find Bogdana, and father, too. Any riot Ladny Vir can start won't trouble a man who has faced Adrianople, I guess."

Dorka nodded her approval.

"If Bogdana can be found, Vassil will find her, Yana," she assured the girl's mother. "But do you be careful of yourself, son."

A horse galloped up the street and stopped at the garden gate.

"Dontcho!" Pericles pulled at the bell and yelled at the same time. Vassil sprang to open it; Yana cried out in delight as she caught sight of the white-faced girl in his arms.

"Welcome, Pericles! You'll never have a warmer welcome." Dontcho hobbled down the path. "Where did you find her?"

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Vassil lifted her tenderly from his father's arms. Bogdana slipped past him and nestled close to Ivanoff. The lieutenant tied the horse and followed the rest into the house.

"Could you have seen her, Dontcho," the tallow-merchant was explaining in a loud, excited voice. "Caught, right between the soldiers and the prisoners; her clothes almost shot off her; and not a soul of them trying to save her. I dashed into the crowd and grabbed her up. Every minute I expected to see my head go spinning away."

The riot grew in Pericles's imagination. Yana clung to Dorka, sobbing in terror.

"What the outcome will be, God only knows," the Greek continued. "What can that handful of half-baked schoolboys do against trained Turkish soldiers? And Enver Bey's thousands likely to reach Ladny Vir any minute. Our lives won't be worth a copper *stotinka* by tomorrow morning."

"Are the Turks really here!" Yana shrieked.

"Why, just listen for yourself," Pericles answered. "A regular pitched battle. We must all get out of here tonight. Take a carriage to the Kayadjik railroad station, and the train to Sofia."

"But no more refugees are allowed in Sofia," Dontcho's parched lips cracked as he spoke. "I inquired today."

"True enough," Pericles interrupted, "but for officers' families—Vassil says special arrangements can be made."

Dontcho's arm trembled about his daughter's waist.

"I'm glad for you, Christoff," he said huskily, "and when the rush comes—these walls are strong—and I can still pull a trigger on occasion."

"Now be calm, neighbors; sit down." Pericles waved a soothing hand. "Vassil will not see his own family saved before Bogdana's. Eh, son?"

Vassil looked straight in Ivanoff's face.

"Bogdana and I have known for years that—when we were children—you and father pledged us to each other. Now—of course—an officer can get the same privileges for his wife's family as for his own."

"The brave, blessed lad!" Yana sobbed on the shoulders of Vassil's mother. "I do love him like my own son, Dorka."

Dontcho felt his daughter start in surprise and shiver a little as the lieutenant spoke.

"You might," he admitted to Vassil, "but she isn't your wife. How could you marry her in time with the village in this uproar?"

"We could be off at once to the monastery, up there. The Turks will get up the mountain last of all. Abbot Clement can marry us, and we'll be off to Sofia before daylight."

Scattered rifle-shots punctuated his words.

Dontcho nodded a slow assent. He looked about the room; anguish lined the veteran's face.

"And I had thought to keep my home—to the end—for my little girl here. But life is enough in these Balkans."

He took Bogdana's face in his calloused hands and tilted it until he could look into the brown eyes.

"You've heard what Vassil says, little dear one," he said. "Will you marry him tonight and save us all?"

She broke away from his grasp.

"Don't put it that way, father," she begged huskily. "Isn't there some other way? Can't we go with you—can't mother and father go without—that—Vassil?"

The lieutenant waved his hand helplessly.

"Of course there is no other way," Pericles interposed sharply for his son. "Law is law; Vassil can do only what is permitted him."

"But—I do not *love* him," Bogdana's white face crimsoned with shame. "How can I just marry him, father?"

"Love!" Yana exclaimed scornfully. "What nonsense do you prate about love? Of course you love Vassil. You've played with him all your life."

"And I have always loved you, Bogdana," Vassil pled softly.

Bogdana gripped the back of a chair for support. If only a bullet had struck her—out there—but Vassil's father had risked his own life to save hers. And—Liuby was dead. Her reason reeled in the matted webwork of the night's events. She had nothing to support her; her father and mother both waited for her answer. If only her death could save them—but it was her life that was needed.

"You'll have time enough to learn about love, daughter," Dontcho roused her. "You know Vassil; he loves you. And this night does not tarry for fine distinctions."

"Help me save you all, Bogdana." Vassil stepped to her and took her hand in his

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own. The girl's body grew tense, she set her lips hard.

"Well—" she muttered.

Pericles sprang to his feet, clapping his approval.

Vassil bent over her.

"You will marry me, Bogdana?" he demanded. "At once—tonight?"

SHE raised her eyes to his own, but they traveled past him to the doorway. With a sharp cry, she jerked her hands away from Vassil's.

Everyone turned to the threshold where Liubomir and Rashko stood side by side, rifles in hand. Neither saluted. The lieutenant snatched his sword.

"Liubomir—private!" he challenged. "I arrest you as a deserter!"

"And I charge you with disobeying your own superiors and purposely exposing a man to death," Liubomir answered through gritted teeth. "You sent me to patrol the track south of Kara Beili when you knew the last train had left Soflu. You sent me there for the Turks to kill, Vassil Christoff, lieutenant!"

He scoffed at the last word.

Vassil sprang directly in front of him, naked sword in hand.

"I give you five seconds to swallow those words," he thundered.

But the private was too quick for him. With a spring, Liubomir caught the officer's hand and wrenched the sword from his grasp. It went spinning across the room.

"And I give you half an hour to get out of Ladny Vir, out of this country, unless you crave the fate of those Turkish prisoners tomorrow. This riot was the concoction of Greek alarmists. Your father provided Costi and Spiro with their horses, the baker wore your old lieutenant's cap when I shot him. And they revealed their whole plot in my presence, when they thought me as good as dead in Yorgi's cellar. The commandant begins his inquest at midnight and I shall testify."

Vassil's face turned ashy; Pericles grabbed Dorka and pulled her toward the door.

"We must—at once—get out of here, Vassil!"

The son turned angrily on his father.

"Get out of here?" he snarled. "Yes, we must get out. And where shall we go? This is the end of your dirty game to *save* the girl and get her land."

"As far as I can see, my gallant lieutenant," Pericles retorted, pointing at Liubomir, "you haven't managed your own affairs very thoroughly, or he wouldn't be here to ruin mine."

"What are you wrangling over now?" Dorka wailed. "Let us go—get what we can and go. Oh, make your half-hour a whole one, good schoolmaster!"

She would have fallen at Liubomir's feet had Vassil not caught her.

"We haven't a minute to lose in begging," he jerked her through the door, Pericles crowding on their heels.

"But the Turks?" Yana gasped.

"Listen, do you hear them?" Rashko smiled.

The night seemed suddenly very still.

"Didn't you hear what Liuby said? The Greeks stirred up the Turkish prisoners, and the trouble might have been serious if Liuby hadn't shot the ringleader at the outset. That started the Turks too soon. But come, mother Yana, a poor woman with a lad of ten is out in the garden, and they need help badly. Can you give them lodging?"

"Lodging to refugees?" Yana cried. "I'll sleep on the garden gravel tonight and let them all come in. Show me where they are."

"But Mr. Pericles did risk his life for me." Bogdana spoke for the first time.

"He lured you there to save you," Liubomir answered. "That was his share of tonight's work."

"And my share now," Rashko interrupted, is to give you a message from the last guard on duty south of Demotica. Liubomir has been begging me to let him give it to you, but my orders were to give it only to Bogdana."

He pulled the message from his breast-pocket and handed it to the girl, then with a half wistful smile at his comrade Rashko followed mother Yana to the courtyard.

She opened wonderingly the sweat-stained envelope. The color rushed to her cheeks; for some minutes she looked mutely at the dried rose-leaves and petals, her eyes brimming.

Old Dontcho's mind worked slowly and the rush of events had left him quite speechless. Now he turned fiercely on Liubomir.

"You gave them half an hour to escape, Liubomir Velkoff!" he thundered. "But I give them only until I can notify the

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commandant. If Naiden Velkoff's lands are not once more confiscate and returned to his son, I never lost my leg at Shipka Pass!" And the wooden-legged old soldier stumped furiously out of the room.

Liubomir stared after him in amazement.

"Velkoff?" he echoed. "Liubomir Velkoff? Naiden—I've read of the patriot Naiden Velkoff."

"He was your father, Liuby." Bogdana came a step nearer. "The Abbot Clement told me yesterday morning when we thought—after he had heard—you died saving a refugee's child."

"I, Naiden Velkoff's son?" Liubomir crossed the space between them. "You mean I have a father, a name? One I could give——"

"A very proud name," she smiled at him, holding the sweat-stained envelope to her cheek. "But the story is long. I think the abbot will tell it to you when you ask him."

"The abbot will not tell me," he took the girl's hands firmly. "You shall tell me, Bogdana."

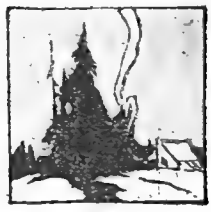
"But it is a long story. Can you wait? Are you not going back to the war, Liuby?"

"Our company has forty-eight hours' leave yet," he answered. "And forty-eight hours is lots of time for our wedding. Yes?"

She laughed softly as he bent to hear her answer.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS



AT THIS writing the events on which is founded "Tallow and Epaulets," by Corrinne and Radoslav Tsanoff, are playing a mighty part in the destiny-changing war that convulses Italy. At the end of the First Balkan War, Bulgaria felt that Greece and Servia, backed by Roumania, had robbed her of many of the fruits of a victory she had been chiefly instrumental in winning. Hence the Second Balkan War, leaving Bulgaria in still worse plight and feeling still more deeply wronged.

Now the bills are being paid. Roumania and probably Greece are ready to enter the war on the side of the Allies, but Bulgaria seizes the opportunity to regain what she lost. Until she is placated, Greece and Roumania hesitate to take the plunge, lest a new foe eager for vengeance, arise on their borders. If they entered the struggle now—especially if Bulgaria joined with them, it would perhaps mark the turning-point of the whole war, deciding the future of Europe for generations to come.

So that the events in our story are really a crisis in the history of the world.

Here is a letter from Mr. Tsanoff, written just before the outbreak of the great war:

It may add to your interest in the story to know that it is in no sense fancy-spun-and-woven. Practically all the plot-ideas in it are based on straight-away Balkan history. *Naiden Velkoff's* historical prototype, for instance, was called Mito Tsvétkoff, and the tallow-deal of that rebel fund-promoter, consummated some forty years ago, actually brought 13,000 francs to the revolutionary organization of Vratza, a town north of Sofia.

MY BROTHER, who served in the railroad-patrol at Kara Beili, will be sure to say that we have treated the Greeks of Tbrase (?) too rosily. His personal appearance when he arrived home in Philippopolis early one morning last July suggested the description of *Liubomir's* return to Ladny Vir—and indeed the writing of this whole story; but the true account of the adventures of his little band of soldiers and refugees at the hands of real *Pericleses* and *Costis* is, like all completely veracious narratives of Balkan war-life, unfortunately unprintable.

If the writers did not boast a Bulgar name, they could perhaps say more than half the truth and still be believed. As it is, the moiety must suffice for us; and you have surely read, or will read, the recent Report of the International Carnegie Commission to inquire into the Causes and Effects of the Balkan War, and consequently require no milder persuasion.

I MAY add, however, that the Greeks' conspiracy to incite the Turkish prisoners of Ladny Vir to riot is based on several such actual attempts which took place during our stay in Bulgaria last Summer. The Philippopolis plot did not go very

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far, as the Bulgar authorties early seized the arms intended for the Turks, which a pious Greek priest had secreted in his sanctuary. But in the town of Stara Zagora the neo-Hellenic coup was executed in almost every detail as we have described it in our story. Passing through Stara Zagora a few days after the event, I learned the particulars of the Greek-created panic and riot, which ultimately cost the lives of "several Turkish prisoners" as a conservative Bulgar friend later put it.

SOME of you will remember that Norman Springer, whose three-part story, "Gold at Sea," begins in this issue, spent seven years at sea. Most of this time he was in stoke holds and engine-rooms, though his first two ships were square-riggers. He served four years in the U. S. Navy, making the cruise around the world with the "Sixteen" in 1907-9.

He had a year and a half in Australia and the colonies. Among other things, he and a chum wandered over a good part of the West Australian "back-blocks" with their swags on their backs—"on the Wallaby," as they call it out there. Now he is comfortably settled in California and, fortunately, writing.

STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS — a story in this issue—has served in both the Third and the Seventh U. S. Cavalry. Also in the Scots Guards, the Thirteenth Regiment of Prince Albert's Somersetshire Light Infantry and the Fifth Royal Irish Lancers. Went to Fez, Morocco, with Sir Charles Euon Smith's Mission to Sultan el Hasan in 1893, was imprisoned four days by the natives but returned to Gibraltar on H. M. S. *Thunderer*. Orderly and assistant interpreter to General Shafter until the fall of Santiago.

MOST of you already know the above and that it is only a part of his adventurous life. But you don't know that he holds a record which should establish him as the most honest man alive.

He was born in Boston, and once, after an absence of several years from home, he borrowed an umbrella from his aunt, expecting to return it that same evening. But it happened that by the time his good aunt was preparing the evening repast of baked beans and brown bread, "Steve" was on board a whaler bound for the arctic regions. After nearly two years among the musk-oxen and Esquimaux of Hudson's Bay, the *Canton* returned Mr. Reynolds to New Bedford. The next day he appeared unexpectedly at his aunt's door with—"Hello, aunt, here's that umbrella I borrowed."

A GOOD suggestion to bearers of our identification-cards comes from Edward J. Richards of Denver. He and a friend coated their cards with shellac, thus making them waterproof and still leaving them entirely readable. It also makes the cards wear better. Only pure white shellac should be used, as other kinds blur the reading-matter.

OUR identification-cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

OF COURSE any communication from the front has to pass through the hands of the censor, but it is interesting to hear from one of us on a British battle-ship, our American friend, Harold S. Lovett, on the *Agamemnon* at the Dardanelles. You will remember that he saw the blowing up of the *Bulwark* and assisted in the gruesome work of picking up the survivors. His own ship is now reported sunk, with the crew saved. The present letter deals with a day's fighting back in March:

No doubt by the time you get this you'll know we had some fight last Thursday. Here's my idea of it: At 10:30 A. M. the *Battling Aggy*, *Queen Liz* and *Lord Help 'Em* commenced a terrific bombardment of the forts at the Narrows, aided by the battle-cruiser *Inflexible* and the French ships *Charlemagne*, *Suffren*, *Bouvet* and *Gaulois*. Behind these were the *Albion*, *Irresistible*, *Vengeance*, *Ocean*, *Swiftsure*, *Majestic*, *Triumph* and *Prince George*—

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four dreadnoughts and twelve pre-dreadnoughts. The forts replied with energy and by 11 A. M. things were sure humming.

SHELLS were dropping all around us, shrieking overhead like the wind in a cyclone. We stopped a few on the *Aggy*, but no material damage was done. One of the forts was soon blazing merrily. Our picket-boats were steaming ahead of each ship on lookout for floating mines. Howitzers and 7.8 field-guns kept up a fierce fire on us from the hills and one shell landed plumb in the *Inflexible's* control, setting it on fire and killing all but one man. She was also struck on the starboard side for'ard, losing about thirty more hands and taking fire so that she retired early in the day.

ONE of the shells which hit us came with such a hustle that we thought a magazine had gone. However, we were all right and no casualties, and by 1:30 all the forts had ceased firing and the *Ocean*, *Albion*, *Swiftsure*, *Majestic*, *Vengeance* and *Irresistible* then advanced to relieve the French ships, who had done splendid work inside the Dardanelles. The floating mines were drifting all around and as she steamed out (about 2 P. M.), the *Bouvet* struck and sank in three minutes, in thirty-six fathoms of water. Every destroyer and picket-boat immediately made for her and succeeded in picking up seventy hands. The Turkish field-guns fired heavily on the rescuers and it got our men wild.

Again we advanced a little and the *Gaulois* got it hot, being so damaged by gun-fire that she had to be beached off Tenedos. All ships received a few souvenirs. Several fierce fires were seen ashore and at 4 P. M. the *Irresistible* sheared off with a heavy list, having struck a mine. However, all hands were saved before she sank at 5:50. By this time the fire of the forts had slackened considerably, but at 6 P. M. the *Ocean* began to settle, she also having found a mine, besides being riddled with shell. Her hands were saved, under a warm fire, by destroyers.

While our picket-boat was attending her, a mine was seen twenty yards ahead of our ship. The "old man" immediately went "full astern" and slewed. The mine missed us by feet and a destroyer exploded it by gun-fire a little later. We drew off at dusk after being in action about ten hours, under a continuous hail of shell most of the time. The *Queen* and *Implacable* are coming to take the place of the two British ships sunk. Anyhow, we found it interesting enough that day, I guess. All ships have been ordered to effect repairs as soon as possible.

I'VE noticed one thing about this action—no one seems to get quite accustomed to shell-fire. Mind you, there is no definite name for the feeling which comes over you when a shell hits in your near vicinity. I can only say one has a vague wonder as to the exact spot where the next is coming. That is only during the first part of the action, then one takes no more notice. But it all happens over again the next time you go into action!

This is all I can tell you this time and I hope you will excuse pencil—ink is cornered.

Wishing you all luck and health.

HAROLD S. LOVETT.

LETTER FRIENDS

Note—This is a service for those of our readers who want some one to write to. For adventurers afield who want a stay-at-home "letter-bunkie," and for stay-at-homes, whether ex-adventurers or not, who wish to get into friendly touch with some one who is out "doing things." We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you, and of course we assume no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

Here are some men to start with, most of them men who have themselves adventured but are now tied down by illness or accident. You who are still out among the branching highways of the world, why not drop them a line? And you, too, who once wandered free or have only dreamed of it.

(1) A. I. Macdonald, 70 Church St., Springfield, Mass.
(2) J. G. Leroy, Y. M. C. A., Brandon, Mass.
(3) E. Windle, Avalon, S. C. I., Calif.
(4) Henry C. Winters, No. 2379. 2nd Remounts, British Expeditionary Force, care of G. P. O., Le Havre, France. (An Australian.)
(5) Lesly Schmidt, 205 N. 6th St., Great Falls, Montana.
(6) Hermann Zabel, Co. F, 2nd Battalion Engineers, Presidio, San Francisco.
(7) Frank A. Hanberry, 1322 N. 22nd St., Philadelphia.
(8) Jack Fitzwallace, Y. M. C. A., Portland, Oregon.
(9) Al De Coste, Box 5, care E. L. Howe, Ft. Wayne, Ind.
(10) D. L. Scanlan, U. S. S. *Washington*, Care Postmaster, New York City.
(11) Herman E. McGehee, Healing Springs, Ark., wants to correspond with some Irish soldier now in the Philippines.
(12) T. Melville Ross, care Aero Club of Great Britain, London, England.

THOSE who have written to George H. Hicks, who suggested our "Letter Friends" department, and whose name formerly appeared in it, will be sorry to learn that he is dead. The letter bringing me the news, states: "He has been receiving a great many comforting letters from far and near."

"THE weather is very cold and wet." This being the sole comment on the hardships, horrors and glories of war in a fairly long letter from a man in the trenches in France during the month of March. And that, he says, is " 'all in the joke.' One consolation, the other fellow is feeling it, too."

He is an Australian, and you'll find his name in our new department, "Letter Friends." It seems, too, that the little old war over in Europe is only a temporary sop to his love of adventure:

I should like very much to get a few lines from some of the members of the Camp-Fire, and would like to get in touch with some one undertaking an expedition (when this racket is finished and I am free), preferably to Borneo or the Amazon district. I am well acquainted with the manners and

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customs of the South Americans, though I have never yet tackled the Amazon, my tours being farther South.

BULLY HAYES again: A. T. Saunders of North Adelaide, South Australia, wrote me some time ago that he had made exhaustive research into the history of Hayes. Later he sent me an article he had published in the Perth *Times*, and three pamphlets reprinted from the *Mail*. He expects soon to issue this and additional material in book form, and I imagine it will be the most complete and authoritative work in existence on the notorious and mysterious character of the South Seas.

Later, I hope to present to you some of the most interesting points from Mr. Saunders's findings, but any of you who have special interest in Hayes should by all means get the book.

OUT of his service in the U. S. Marine Corps grew Robert J. Pearsall's story in this number:

Anyway, I had a great deal of fun writing this story, it recalling as it did some of the most amusing and exciting experiences I ever passed through.

AS YOU will surmise, these stories of Peking are about half imagination and half—but slightly varnished—truth. The situation in Peking is—or was when I was there, four years ago—exactly as I have described; and if you can suggest a situation more fitted for complications than some thousand or more troops of different nationalities living together within a walled area about two miles square, all affected more or less by the liberty—not to say license—which is inevitably accorded white men in the Orient, and with discipline pretty well relaxed owing to the difficulties attendant upon courts martial and the desire of the several commanding officers to preserve a clean record for their commands, I should like to have it.

THE year I spent there was a very full one. Every time I think of it I want to go back. I will some time. And yet the one souvenir I have, that I shall undoubtedly cherish through life, is a Roman nose—that was originally Grecian—molded by a "shower of bricks," as a fellow combatant felicitously put it, during the progress of one of our ever-recurring feuds. This time it was with the Austrians. Rough sport—it was that—but in a month's time we and the Austrians were making common cause against another common enemy. Men talk of the monotony of the East—I never found it so.

WITHOUT any warning whatsoever Talbot Mundy sent me the following poem, of which I am the hero—if you want to call it that.

Camp-fire pen-picture of ADVENTURE'S *editor, after reading stories by Dingle, McGrew, Mundy, Townend, and so on.*

'E DEKKOS at yer sideways, and there's murder in his glim—
Oh my-y-y! Oh my!
And a brace o' clerks are sweatin' wet, a' tremblin', watchin' him
A-openin' his briefs—Oh, my!
He grips a bloody Dyak kris, and jams it in a chit,
An' rips the paper open like a feller's throat was slit;
An' 'e lets a 'tween-deck whisper, an' the two clerks throws a fit,
'Cause 'e likes to see 'em gurgulin'—Oh, my-y-y!
And it's always best to humor 'im—Oh, my!

HE SITS an' chews his fingers while 'e reads his mornin' mail—
Oh, say-ay-ay! Oh, say!
And his roving eye gets haggard, and his livid lips are pale—
For the things 'e reads! Oh, say!
And the tiger-skin 'e sits on, and the python on the floor;
And the awful, hugly devil-fish what hangs above the door;
An' the juju, an' the fetish, an' the boot what J. James wore,
They tremble 'cause 'e shudders so—Oh, say-ay-ay!
An' the clerks—Oh, watch 'em shudder too! Oh, say!

THERE'S a Chinese stink-pot handy on the desk beside the ink—
Oh, Gee-ee-ee! Oh, Gee!
An' 'e'll use it on yer lively, yes, an' sooner than yer'd think,
If yer didn't beat it quick—Oh, Gee!
He drinks hot blood for breakfast, an' he likes it in a pail,
And 'e spends his off-hours watchin' for the black flag on the jail;
And you mustn't never go and tie no crackers to his tail—
Oh, Hully Gee! Oh, Gee!
Because he's got rejection-slips he'd send yer through the mail—
Oh, Gee!

T. M.

SOMETIMES we get complaints that letters to inquirers in our "Wanted" column are not answered. This magazine, of course, has no responsibility in the matter, as stated in the column itself. Doubtless in some cases the failure to reply is due to carelessness and lack of ordinary courtesy and fairness on the part of those who insert the notices. But there may be other reasons. For example:

Would you please insert this in your "Men Wanted" column? Owing to the continuous stream of replies to my ad. re. homesteading partner, in the June issue of *Adventure*, and also to the fact that I have little or no spare time at this time of the year

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(working from 4:30 A. M. till six or eight o'clock and batching it likewise), I will be unable to reply to the big majority for some months, if at all. I heartily thank those good enough to write and will answer as many as I can during the next six months.

—ARTHUR S. FORD.

No one, under the circumstances, can possibly blame Mr. Ford. Rather, you are inclined to take your hat off to him.

WHEN you consider that a "Wanted" notice may bring hundreds of replies, you can see that a good deal of time is needed to reply to all of them. And some dollars of cash.

Also, undoubtedly, some of the letters should never be written and really deserve no reply, being from men who should know they are totally unfit for the place they apply for.

And when you write, state your qualifications. Don't just say: "Am interested. Want full details." Your bad judgment in doing that is in itself enough to prove your unfitness. There will be plenty of other letters that do state qualifications.

—ARTHUR S. HOFFMAN.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care U. S. Consul, Para, Brazil. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary. (Five cents postage in this case.)

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska; the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Ag., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal North West Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

Mail Address and Forwarding.—This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

For cabin-boat and small boat travel on the Mississippi and its tributaries, "The Cabin-Boat Primer," by Raymond S. Spears; A. R. Harding, Publisher, Columbus, O. $1.00.

WANTED MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

YOUNG American, age 27, who has already made two complete tours of world, is contemplating starting about October 1st on another tour, visiting Panama, San Francisco, South Sea Islands, New Zealand, Australia, China and Japan, for the purpose of pleasure, adventure, and to take moving pictures. Desires to correspond with several intelligent persons with the view of accompanying him. Preference given to congenial, educated persons of good moral habits, who possess good common sense and ability to either write and direct moving-picture plays, write composition, act, knowledge of photography, and operate moving-picture machine, and able to defray their own personal expense, but will share profit on pictures, etc. Advertiser who is now in business for himself will finance complete outfit necessary for venture, and will also be glad to employ successful applicants until ready to start. In replying, please be frank and give full particulars about yourself, experience, as well as character references, which will be exchanged.—Address PROVIDENT, Box 1218, San Antonio, Texas.

TWO partners to go with me this Fall, hunting, trapping, prospecting, etc., in Arizona. Stay all Winter. I know the country. Only those who mean business and don't fear roughing it need apply.—Address W. H. NAPIER, Box 1331, Phoenix, Ariz.

FOUR good live fellows for exploration expedition. Prefer men that have had some hard knocks, who want adventure instead of large wages, handy around motor engines, camera, guns, and able to ride. Will leave New Orleans on motor-yacht on or about September 1st for Algeria, Tunis, Tripoli, Morocco and Rio-de Oro. If interested enclose stamp for reply and furnish previous record of experiences.—Address PROF. FRANK WARREN, 216 W. 5th St., Topeka, Kansas.

MEN who can shoot, ride, etc., to enlist in Volunteer Regiment of Cavalry, organized in Wisconsin. To be composed of adventurers, sportsmen, ex-service men, etc. Nothing required. When regiment is ordered to field you'll be notified when and where to report for duty. Vacancies fast filling, but always room for the right men left.—Address O. P. HAGENAH, 413 16th St., Milwaukee, Wis.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER to go east of mountains or to Mexico. I have no money but am willing to do anything. Don't write if you're afraid of anything or if you're over 30 yrs. of age. I am 21, 6 ft., 2 in., been all over Eastern part of U. S. and Canal-Zone and most of Europe. Served in U. S. Army till last Fall.—Address EMIL PFEIFFER, Benton Hotel, 1420 Sixth Ave., Seattle, Wash.

YOUNG man 21 or 22 yrs. of age, who can rough it and do some walking. Must be healthy. I have a good plan in which we can see some sport. There may be some money in the finish, but I will not guarantee it, and it will be worth the risk.—Address CAPTAIN A. J. HADVIGAR, 264 Hancock Ave., Bridgeport, Conn.

YOUNG man about 24 years old, willing to go to Alaska to work on new railroad doing anything. I am a good lineman and engineer. Must be willing to work way and not afraid of hard knocks, and have some previous experience in roughing it. American preferred.—Address Box 231, Zeeland, Mich.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

POLTER, CALOIN B. Last heard from June, 1914, on steamer from Orient to Victoria, B. C. Daughter inquires. Important business.—Address M. R. P., care *Adventure.*

GRAHAM, DAN, age 32. Last heard of as wheeler on S. S. *Harold B. Nye* on Lakes. Will reward information. —Address JOSEPH GRAHAM, 560 Bathurst St., London, Ont., Can.

KRETZ, WILLIE, of Beaumont, Texas, 1910. Father is connected with Traction Co. Moved to Texarkana, Ark., or Shreveport, La.—Address JOE HENDERSON, Box 756, Beaumont, Texas.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

ANY one who served in Troop L, Fourth United States Cavalry in Philippines between July, 1899, and 1901, when the regiment returned to the United States. Also from James Greer, William Bunch, Edward A. Witmer, Chester C. Higgins, of the same troop.—FRED TAGGART TRAVIS, Lock Box 48, Clinton, Ind.

MAXWELL, WILLIAM. Born, Glasgow, Scotland, father's name John Burns Maxwell, brothers called Jim, Joe, Alex, John and George. Sisters called Kate, Jessie and Ruby. Last heard of down South. General adventurer.—Address GEORGE MAXWELL, 254 Church St., Toronto, Ont., Can.

SCULLY, JOHN J. 34 yrs. old. Bricklayer. Formerly of Holyoke, Mass., and also of Nicolet College, Canada. Speaks French fluently. Last heard of Goldfield, Nevada.—Address D. T. SCULLY, 305 Dillaye Memorial Bldg., Syracuse, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

INGERSOLL, HARRY G. Horse wrangler and buster. Rode brands in New Mexico, Arizona and California. Also worked on R. R. bridge gangs and mines. Last heard of 5 yrs. ago in Colorado and Wyoming. 46, 5 ft., 6 in., 165 lbs.—Address B. E. INGERSOLL, Roswell, New Mexico.

ROGERS, HENRY. Telephone and telegraph lineman. Last heard from Memphis, Tenn., March 11, 1915. 5 ft., 6 in., 150 lbs., dark hair, dark eyes, 22 yrs. old. His father would like to hear from him.—Address JOHN A. ROGERS, R. No. 2, Box 109, New Decatur, Ala.

MARGOLIN, Louis, brother. 6 ft., complexion fair, brown curly hair, flat nose. Last heard of Kansas City, Mo. 1910, working as agricultural man for a land improvement company.—Address SAMUEL MARGOLIN, 109 North St., Bennington, Vt.

BLACK, LAMAR. Discharged from the U. S. Navy, July 8, 1914, at Puget Sound. Last heard from Bremerton, Wash. Thought to be in Government employ in West. —Address LARRY MODRELL, Toledo, Ill.

BRANDT, Sergt.-Major; Clark, Captain; Ross, 2nd Lieut. (Shorty), of Racine, 1911-12, or any of the others of the "bunch."—Address R. F. FARRANT, 1735 Park Ave., Chicago, Ill.

ALDRIDGE, HARRY C., husband. Last heard of Chicago about 1905. Left New York State 1886. Was located in Denver, later in San Francisco, in employ of Singer M'f'g. Co.—Address L. T., No. 279.

BRAM, DANIEL HARRY, my son. 21 yrs. old. Last heard of 8 years ago, when he was put ashore from a boat at some Mississippi River port by Bert Bassett, his employer, who had induced him to go under the name of Daniel Bassett, Daniel Quimby, Daniel French and Daniel Willett.—Address MRS. FLORENCE PUFF, 4536 Varrelmann Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

COSTELLOE, JACK, brother. Can anyone inform me as to his whereabouts.—Address JEANETTE COSTELLOE, 2 Nelson St., Coburg, Melbourne, Australia.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

SCATES, JAMES A. Bunkie, Engineer Corps, 1901-'04. Last heard from in British Columbia, 1905. Write your old pal.—Address HOWARD MEREDITH, Priest River, Idaho.

BYRD, L. B. and Shepard, W. C., who were with me on the West coast of Mexico, 1908 and 1909.—Address R. E. DALE, care Marconi Wireless Telegraphy Co., Galveston, Texas.

IRWIN, E. T., jockey and telegrapher. Last heard of leaving Dunbar, Pa., for Denver, Colo. Write your old pal.—Address H. T. LANE, Radio Opr., care U. P. Co., 321 St. Charles St., New Orleans, La.

PARKER, O. B., formerly of Mexico. Was in San Antonio about one year ago. Of importance to him.— Address T. H. C. HYDE, 210 Central Office Bldg., San Antonio, Texas.

MCAULIFFE, GEORGE, or Colburn, Johnny, last heard of with V. S. R. S. surveyors at Somerton, Ariz. Spring of 1912.—Address JOE ROBINSON, Box 251, Mogollon, N. M.

PERRY, THOMAS BALANTYNE (or Balantine). Last heard from Havana, Cuba. Information earnestly desired by nephew.—Address ALLAN KNAPP PERRY, 6204 Greenwood Ave., Chicago, Ill.

BRINK, CLIFFORD, cousin. Last heard of in Denver, Colo. A. H. L. died Feb. 4, 1914. Would like to hear from you.—Address LEIGH LAUGHLIN, Box 106, Lisbon, N. D.

JOHNSON, CHARLES H., prospector, carpenter. Last heard of leaving Manhattan, Nevada, on prospecting trip in 1910. Very important.—Address W. S. C., Calexico, Cal.

BEHREND, OTTO, F., brother. Would like to hear from you; have news that will interest you.—Address HUGO E. BEHREND, Oconomowoc, Wis.

ANY member Troop A., 1st U. S. Cavalry, during 1887-92.—Address EX-CORP. FRANK (KID) BLAISDELL, Broadwater, Nebr.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the April or May issues of *Adventure.* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine.

ABERNATHY, SUMNER; Allen, Robert, Bucyrus, O.; Asher, Orlie; Baker, Edward E., 4th Inf., Co. A.; Bee, Taver, Mexico 1901-2; Best, F. P. ("Kid Freddie Best," or "Slats"); Bozan, R. W. (R. W. Pearson); Brown, Fred A. and Brown, Mary; Brue, Charlie (White); Butcher, Bob, Kansas City, Mo.; Canavan, David; Coddington, William; Cook, Elliott (George Coburn); Dabympple, Charles S.; Dennis, Lee A., Oklahoma, 1906; Duncan, George Riley; Dunn, James, B Co., Tia Jauina, Mexico; Foster, John Frank; Futchison, George; Galloway, James R.; Gaylord, C. W.; Gottlieb, Edward; Grace, E. Leslie; Harris, Joe, Webster, N. D., 1909; Hughes, Henry; Kane, Barney; Keys, Levy; King, Frank M., Winnfield, La., 1908; Klemann, Robert; Lantz, Samuel Joseph, Oregon, Jan., 1914; Leach, O. L. (Slim); Lloyd, Edmund, Box, John and George; McCandless, Alexander and descendants; McIntosh, James W., Victoria, B. C., 1898; Macpherson, J. W. Goldfield, Nevada; Maples, Clem M., McComo, Miss.; Massey-Lawless, Frank, H. J. K.; Mazurette, Alfred P.; Miller, T. H., Wingfield, Kansas, June, 1906; Morrisey, John; Moyer, Ted; Nichols, Samuel R., Washington, D. C.; Nolan, Jack, Canada, 1911; O'Neal, Frank, Depot Harbor, Ont., 1900-1; Patterson, Robert J., Cleveland, O.; Pedder, Richard; Penault, Frank, High River, Alberta; Pohl, Bernard H.; Prince, Ben, Memphis, Tenn.; Richard, Charlie E., Cardiff, Wales; Rimer, J. D., 4th Mo. Vol. In 1898; Rose, Jack, Melbourne, Australia, 1913; Ryan, Billy; Ryan, Charles, Meacham, Ore.; Scott, F. B., California, 1912; Scott, Norwood, Lansdown, Pa.; Seery, how many in U. S. and

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Canada; Shea, Timothy, Los Angeles, Cal., 1911; Sheehan, James, Orenco, Ore., 1911; Smith, R. I., Grand Junction, Colo., 1908; Snodgrass, R. L. ("Lee"); Snyder, Bill, Wellesley Hills, Mass., Spang, Chester; St. Clair, Fred, North Yakima, Wash., 1913; Taylor, H. E. (Hal); Trauhauf, Harold A.; Wallenstein, William J.; Washburn, Bert; Weaver, Joseph C.; Wiley, Elsworth; Wilson, Sadie, Duluth, Minn., 1910; Wings, Claud C.; Wixson, Joe B., Ft. Worth, Tex.; Wright, James William.

MISCELLANEOUS—Names and addresses, comrades, Co. L, 1st Regt., Maryland Vol. Inf., during war with Spain; Comrades, 30th and 4th U. S. Inf., from 1867 to 1885, especially Co. I; Comrades of 17 Field-Artillery who served in Philippines; Peterson, William (Pete); Watson, Will; Ahl, Bill; English, "Jess;" Vose, Jack; Seay, Clif; Rooney, Bill; Fry, Joe; Baldwin, "Baldy;" Chapman; Kennedy; Molleter; Benner; McKinney; Tyson; Keinricks; Carlysle, Bill; Knode; Appleton; Wilkes; Butler; Davis; Vanlemberg; Burnham; Jenkins; Rice; Bergin; Sullivan; Weinell; Armstrong; Shay; Shendel, and other knights of the "Big Stick" who worked for the W. E. Company in Bangor, Me., after the fire, April 30, 1911; Corporal discharged Sept. 2, 1912, from Troop F, 13th Cav.; Shipmates, *Alice Knowles*, especially green hands, Miller of Los Angeles, Meyers of Salida, Colo., Williams of New Orleans; Orphan, adopted name, Violet McMaster, inquiring about herself; "Windy" Bache, "Ballyhoola," "Star Pointer" Brumby, or any of the boys that were in Troop G, 5th U. S. Cav., at Aibonita, P. R., at time of hurricane in Aug., 1899; Webb, Percy, M. C., Birch, W., Ekin or Pilary, J. M.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 107, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, C 189, C 205, L. T. 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Edward Weston, Rochester, N. Y.; R. Spanjardt, Montreal, Que., Can.

RANDOLPH H. ATKIN, S. N. Morgan and Will S. Green, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure*.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: As announced before, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to the stories mentioned in our ad on page two, the following are at present scheduled for the October issue of ADVENTURE, out September 3d:

STOLEN THUNDER

Samuel Alexander White

Sark and Bassett, Klondike business men, get into the thick of a gold stampede.

THE OATH BY THE EARTH

Gordon McCreagh

Another story of India hill-folk told by a man who knows the Himalayas.

FROM THE TIP OF THE ROCKET

Albert Payson Terhune

An exciting robbery, and a race across the blistering Syrian desert.

GOLD AT SEA

Norman Springer

The second instalment of this startling tale of modern piracy.

FIGURES CAN'T LIE

Arthur Somers Roche

Our Secret Service strikes swiftly when Government defense plans are stolen.

IT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED OTHERWISE

Hugh Pendexter

A telegrapher's life is not all drudgery—not if he robs himself and then ties himself up.

"FURRINERS"

Harold Titus

A fight between the lumberjack of yesterday and the foreign lumber-worker of today.

CHIQUITA OF THE LEGION

Donald Francis McGrew

She is the ideal of the French Foreign Legion; you must meet her.

MADAME JUSTICE

Nevil G. Hanshaw

Stirring times were those that followed the Civil War, when bandit carpet-baggers invaded Louisiana.

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